



THE
STORY OF
JULIETTE

BY

BEATRICE WASHINGTON



W. Washington
Story of Juliette

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Madeleine .

from

her loving

Auntie Emma

Christmas 1892.





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THE STORY OF JULIETTE





"BUT THE MAIDEN AND THE DRAGON SAT ON SERENELY."

THE
STORY OF JULIETTE

A Child's Romance

BY
BEATRICE WASHINGTON

“Only a girl, — only seven.” — JEAN INGELow

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS

1892

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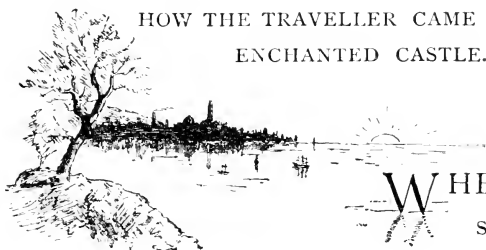
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THE
STORY OF JULIETTE.

A CHILD'S ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE TRAVELLER CAME TO THE
ENCHANTED CASTLE.



WHEN the
sun sets
in the emer-
ald sea that dances along the shores of
France, it turns the quaint little town
of St. Servans into an Enchanted City;
for the slanting rays of the sunset fall
full upon it, and bathe the whole in a
flood of gold. As the gleams catch

each slated roof or gilded weather-cock, they splinter themselves into a thousand dazzling fragments, and each window sparkles like a diamond, or glows like a ruby, while down in the harbor the tall masts shoot up into the sky like burnished spears, and below them, in the dancing water, their reflections writhe and twist, green and gold and scarlet, like sea-serpents on fire.

Once a traveller got lost in the Enchanted City at sunset, and could not find his way out of it. If he looked toward the harbor, the sea and the sky seemed a lake of light, and the myriad masts rose out of it like flames, so that his eyes were dazzled; and if he turned his back on the sun, and looked up the hill, the windows and the street-lamps and the roofs, all flashed back the sunset with such marvellous brilliancy that the

town seemed on fire. So he felt baffled on every side; and though he was a shy traveller, and spoke French very badly, he made up his mind to ask the way.

For a long time he found no one to whom he could venture to address himself; for it was a fête day, and most of the people had gone over the hill to a fair in the next village, or were amusing themselves with the sailors in the harbor. So the traveller went on till he came to a crooked side-street that straggled up one side of the hill. The houses were irregularly built, and half-way up the slope they ceased altogether, and the road degenerated into a mere cart-track, and this again dwindled to a grassy foot-path that ran along by the side of an old wall. The traveller was just beginning to think himself less than ever likely to find a

guide in this deserted lane, when a sudden turn of the path brought him in front of a tall, iron gate, half buried in a tangle of lanky nettles and morning-glories. The bars were red with

rust; the curves and flourishes

of the scroll-work were

hung with cobwebs;

and the stone

vases which

crowned the

pillar on either

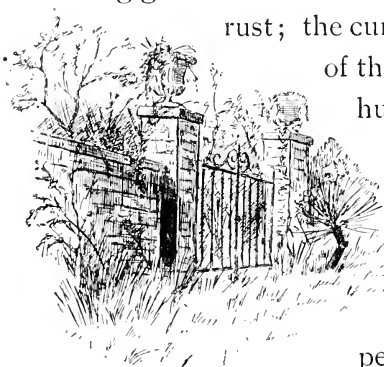
side had become

perfect wildernesses

of grass and poppies

and yellow moss.

Had the stranger been an artist, he would have forgotten all about his destination, and there and then filled his sketch-book with "studies;" had he been a poet, he would have mused over



the silent pathos of the ruins before him, and have written a poem on "The Threshold of the Past," or something quite as melancholy. But he was only a lawyer, and art and parchment do not agree, so he merely gave a very cursory glance to the picturesque gateway, and did what most likely the poet and the artist would have forgotten to do, — he tried to get through it.

But the gate was locked. The rusty bars were stronger than they seemed; and pull and shake as he might, our traveller only got his hands badly stung by the nettles, for his pains.

He was stooping to bind a dock-leaf round his smarting fingers, when he heard himself addressed in an imperious tone from the other side of the gate.

"Que voulez-vous, Monsieur?"

The voice certainly came from with-

in, yet he could see no one. He looked again through the twists and scrolls of the iron-work, but there was nothing to be seen, except the green path continued through a grove of laurels.

“Dites-donc!” said the imperious voice close beside him; “que voulez-vous, Monsieur?”

“Monsieur” turned sharply, but only to graze his elbow against a jutting angle of the wall. Certainly the voice came from that direction; and acting upon a happy thought, he squeezed himself close up against the opposite corner of the gate, and looked through it sideways toward the angle. There, in strong relief against the gray crumbling stones of the old wall, framed in the tangled wreaths of a pumpkin-vine, the traveller beheld the quaintest, prettiest picture he had ever seen.

Perched airily among the green fans of the pumpkin foliage, sat a little maiden, so small, yet so exquisitely proportioned that the traveller — had he not torn up and forgotten all his childish stories long ago — might have mistaken her for a fairy. She was dressed in a very simple little frock of faded green, that reached almost to her toes, and wore, instead of a cap, a yellow scarf tied over her brown curls. From this improvised cap, the hair broke loose in rich masses and clusters of dusky curls that floated over and around the little face like a cloud, and through the breezy tendrils that clustered about her forehead shone two dark shadowy eyes. Those eyes attracted and held a stranger's glance at once; but the traveller noticed also the rich coloring of cheeks and lips, and the delicate oval of the face.

He almost started, as he turned his eyes to her companion; for there, rampant among the great, yellow gourds and dusty, green leaves, with two terrible wings outspread, and one claw raised, he beheld a fierce beast, known to him in nursery days as a dragon. This creature looked fully as forbidding as the monsters of fairy lore. It was as large as a mastiff, and with the exception of two ferocious, red eyes, was a beautiful blue, streaked with green stains, and mellowed by the touch of time into an harmonious turquoise hue.

The traveller stared hard at this curious pair; but the maiden and the Dragon sat on serenely, — she with her arms round his neck, and her curly head reposing against one outstretched wing. She seemed not at all surprised at the ridiculous attitude of the stranger, — he

was squeezed up against the wall, gingerly holding on to the gate, with his face pressed close against the rusty bars ; but presently she repeated her question in the same imperious tone.

Not knowing, or at least for the moment not remembering, what he did want there, the traveller replied, in his best French, " I have lost my way."

The little maiden rose, and pushing aside the pumpkin-leaves with tiny brown hands, came toward him saying slowly :

" They always do lose their way ; but you have found it at last."

" Have I ? " he asked eagerly ; " then who are you ? "

She stood quite still for a moment, with one little hand on the gate, looking up through the bars, and then threw back her head with a gesture of queenly disdain.

“Do you not know? I am an Enchanted Princess, and this is my keeper, — the Dragon.”

“Oh,” said the traveller.

“I will let you in,” went on the Princess, drawing a big key from her sash, and fixing it, with some difficulty, into the lock; “but you have come too soon. The Apples of Life are not ripe yet.”

“No,” said the traveller, rather sadly; “they will never ripen for me.”

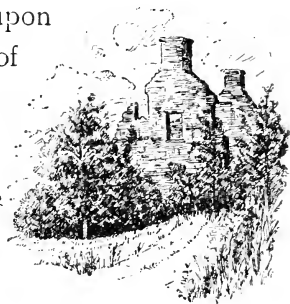
The Princess had pulled the gate open now, and he went in, half curious, half amused, and stood waiting while she re-locked it, and put the key back into her sash. Then she held out her hand, and he took it in his, and so they went along the laurel-walk.

“They always ripen,” said the small, clear voice at his side, “when the King comes. But he is away; and you must

wait. When the King comes," she cried, joyously, clasping the hand she held, and smiling up at him through the tangle of curls, "the Apples of Life all turn to gold, and any one may pick them. You have only to wait for three weeks now; so you need not go back."

They had come out upon the deserted garden of an old French château.

The gravel-drive was green with weeds; the flowers had left the *parterres* to run wild over the daisy-sprinkled lawn; and the rose-bushes trailed their sweet festoons across the path in charming but reckless confusion.



Beyond the lawn stood the ruins of

an old house, half covered with creepers. The fire-tinted streamers of the Virginia creeper waved from the gables, and looped themselves across the shuttered windows; the roses had begun an adventurous ascent, and stopped half-way, heaped up in glowing masses round the pillars of the porch, or thrown across the steps. Swallows darted from the eaves to circle round the broken sundial on the lawn; and a few white pigeons spread their silver fans upon the roof.

Was this the Enchanted Castle? The Princess stepped along demurely till they reached the closed door, and then she pointed to a seat in the porch.

"Sit there," she said, dusting the stone with her little green gown; "I will go and tell the Queen."

So the traveller sat alone in the rose-covered porch before the closed door, and the Princess ran away round the corner of the deserted house, through the sweetbrier hedge, and out of sight.



CHAPTER II.

VIRGINIE, AND THE QUEEN, AND THE
ENCHANTED PRINCESS.



HE traveller had watched the swallows skimming round the sundial till he was giddy, and had counted the bees about the roses till he was tired, when the Princess came back. She held up her hands to keep the rays of the low sun from her eyes, and looked at the stranger from under its shadow.

“The Queen cannot come to you, for she is busy; but if you will come

with me I will show you the tree where grow the Apples of Life," she said.

The traveller hesitated, fearing to appear intrusive, and the little maiden gazed at him thoughtfully.

"Of course, if you do not care, you need not come; but I must let you out or the Dragon will devour you. He will know you are not the right sort. Shall I let you out?"

"No, no; I should like to see the Tree of Life."

"Then you must come this way; take care you do not tear your coat."

The princess stepped deftly through the hedge of sweetbrier; and the traveller, unused to such a thorny path, scrambled through as best he could, and received a good many pricks and scratches in the process. They went round the side of the house, and found

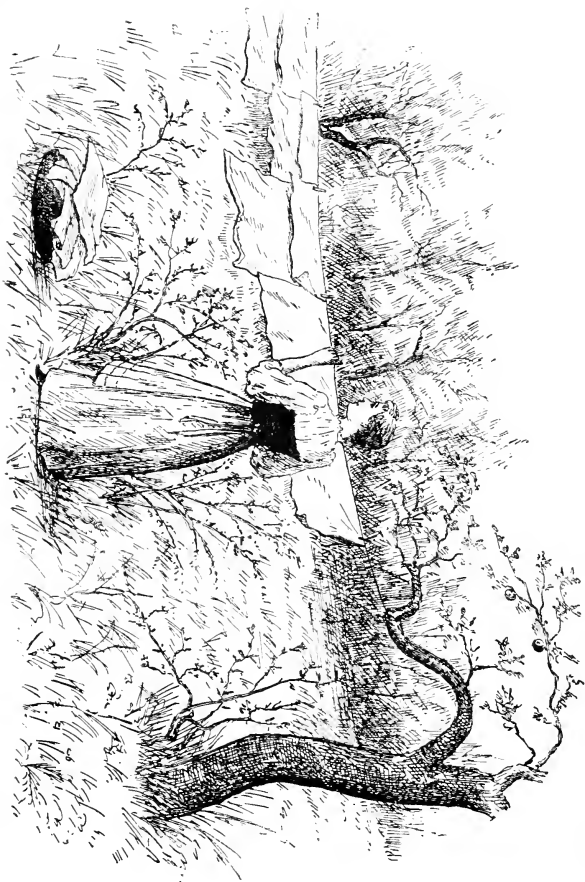
themselves on a little lawn, in the midst of which stood a great apple-tree, with gnarled roots and mossy boughs, weighed down with ripening fruit. Round the lawn grew smaller fruit trees and bushes, and at the back spread a little kitchen-garden. A clothes-line was slung from one of the apple-boughs to a slender cherry-tree, and under the line of fluttering linen stood a young girl in a pink cotton dress, folding the snowy garments and laying them in a basket.

“Virginie!” called the Princess, “here is a traveller who has lost his way. He is come to see the Tree of Life.”

Virginie turned, and gave a little start. She had expected to see some old mendicant, not the young barrister who stood at the edge of the lawn beside her little sister, in evident embarrassment.

His confusion made her forget her

“VIRGINIE TURNED AND GAVE A LITTLE START.”



own, and she advanced with a bright smile of welcome, and dropped the linen to hold out her hands in kindly French fashion.

“Bon soir, Monsieur!” said Virginie.

Her face was just such another as that smiling up from under the Princess’s shadowy curls, only more wide awake, more piquant. Here the dark eyes sparkled with animation, and the loose curls, gathered up into a classic knot, were streaked with gleams of gold. Perhaps the beauty was not so ideal, nor dreamy, but it was none the less charming.

“Pray — I — pray do not let me interrupt you,” stammered the traveller, feeling that his French was atrocious, “I — we lost our way — I mean I lost mine — and —”

“No; you have found it,” said the

Princess, pointing to the apple-tree; "but you must wait till the King comes home. Then the apples will be gold."

Virginie laughed, and turned again to her clothes-line. When all the fresh, white linen was folded and laid away in the basket, and she had collected the little wooden pegs into her apron, she went over to the apple-tree, and stood leaning against a low branch, watching the stranger and the Princess. They were talking together quite amiably, and the Princess had bound up the torn hand in her little handkerchief.

"Come, Marie Juliette," said Virginie, "the sun has gone to sleep; it is time for bed."

"But here is the poor traveller;" replied the Princess, "where can he go? He is all alone in this country, he says."

"That reminds me," said the poor traveller, rising, "that I came here to ask my way, and lost it. Can you direct me to the Rue de la Courte Côte?"

Virginie considered with her pretty brows knit into a little perplexed frown.

"Yes — but I am afraid it is very — well — complicated; there are so many turns. Shall I show you the way?"

"A thousand thanks! But indeed I do not need to trouble you; I am sure I could find it."

"I don't think you could, for you don't speak French very well," said Virginie, with charming candor. "But I daresay I can come. If you will help me carry in that basket, we can ask my mother."

"Certainly," said the traveller, directly forgetting all about his torn hand;

and he looked down at the Princess, who was studying him thoughtfully.

“Shall I say good-night, then, Princess Juliette?”

“If you are going to see the Queen,” said the Princess, “I think you had better wash your face.”

The traveller grew very red, and Virginie laughed till the pegs rolled out of her apron; but the little maiden went on quite gravely, “It’s where you squeezed yourself against the bars, to look through. The marks came off on your face.”

“Never mind,” said Virginie, picking up her clothes-pegs, “you can use the pump, if you like; and here’s a clean cloth. See! — there is the pump, — under the scarlet-runner.”

The young barrister, who had recovered his presence of mind, laughed.

good-humoredly, and agreed to the proposal; and the Princess worked the pump-handle with such vigor that his hair and clean collar were completely saturated: but one does not mind such trifles in an Enchanted Castle, especially if there are two charming maidens looking on, and a Queen in prospect.

When the operations under the pump were completed, the Princess led the way, across the lawn, to the back of the house; the others following with the basket. They came to an open door, beside which stood a wooden bench, a barrel of grain, and some gardening tools. Virginie went in with the basket, telling the others to wait for her. While they did so, the traveller noticed that this part of the house, at least, seemed inhabited. A white curtain fluttered from the open casement of a window

near him, and a tortoise-shell cat crouched on the sill. Through the door, which Virginie had left ajar, he saw a high wooden dresser, and a table covered with clean linen and ironing implements, and the basket which she had set down upon the red-tiled floor.

Presently Virginie came back, followed by a pretty little Frenchwoman, plump, dark-haired, and bright-eyed, with a posy of mignonette pinned into the big bib-apron that covered her gray gown. She shook hands affably, and smiled, her keen eyes taking in every detail of the young barrister's face and dress, as he stood up and bowed, with his hat in his hand. Virginie had made clear how matters stood, so he was saved the difficulty of explaining his position, and waited courteously for

Madame to speak, which she did somewhat volubly, but very prettily, offering her daughters as guides, and pressing him to take some refreshment, after his search so fruitless, so mortifying, and his loss of time so great. Refreshment he refused; but the escort he received with thanks, and evident pleasure.

“Hasten then, Virginie!” cried the Queen, clapping her hands to emphasize her words, “to conduct Monsieur to his destination; and you, Marie Juliette, pluck a grand bunch of roses to offer to your friend. Quick, then!”

The sisters flew at her bidding, — Virginie indoors to fetch her hat and scarf, and the Princess to the garden of roses, to gather a posy from the porch.

“And it is on affairs of business you are come to this country so strange to you?” asked the Queen, filling her

apron with grain for the pigeons, as she spoke.

“Yes,” he said; “it is to see about some property that has been left to me, — a little apple-farm in Normandy. I want to put it into repair, and take my mother there. She is the only one I have left; and she is dying.”

Perhaps it was the kindly interest in Madame’s eyes, perhaps it was the sympathy in Virginie’s face, — she had come up, and was listening, — that had drawn him on to saying so much, for he was very reserved, as a rule, this traveller. But the spell of the Enchanted Castle was upon him, and it opened his heart, and loosened his tongue.

“Where did you say, Monsieur?” asked Virginie, softly. She had put on a big straw hat, tied under the chin

with a pink bow, and had thrown a soft white scarf over her shoulders. She looked like a Gainsborough picture, only she did not know who Gainsborough was, and the traveller himself knew very little more.

“In Normandy,” he said.

The Queen looked up and sighed, and repeated wistfully the words of the old song, —



“‘ Oh ! ma Normandie ! ma Normandie ! ’

I too, Monsieur, have my heart in Normandy. But it grows late; there is the moon high above the apple-tree. I wish you all good fortune, my friend, and health to the *bonne maman!* ”

She held out her hands, wished him good-night, and then went away to call the pigeons.

Virginie looked up from the ground, where she had been tracing patterns with the point of her shoe, and said, "Let us come this way, Monsieur; there," with a little laugh, "you need crawl through the sweetbrier hedge."

But though she laughed there were tear-drops on her lashes, as she turned her face to the moonlight, and one fell on to the folds of her scarf and lay there gleaming softly.

"I am so sorry for you, Monsieur," she said frankly, shaking the tear away; "it is so sad to be all alone in the world! I am sad sometimes, though I am quite happy really, — I have a mother and a father and the Princess. But for you, with only one, and she to be dying — I am so sorry for you!"

"Thank you," said the traveller, simply. He was not given to many words.

By this time they were in the front of the house, and the Princess, who had climbed on to the sun-dial, got down, and ran to meet them, with her hands full of roses.

“See!” she called, holding up her flowers, “these will do for a little time, till the apples are ripe; but you will come back, when the King comes, — won’t you?”

He took the posy and looked at it absently. The flowers were lovely, — great blooms of Gloire de Dijon and Marichal Niel, exquisite damask buds, and deep red roses with hearts of fire; here and there gleamed a white blossom, a globe of pale light lying like a moonbeam among the glowing petals round it.

“Why don’t you speak?” cried the Princess, impatiently, “you are not look-

ing at them at all, with your eyes. Perhaps you are thinking of the apples?"

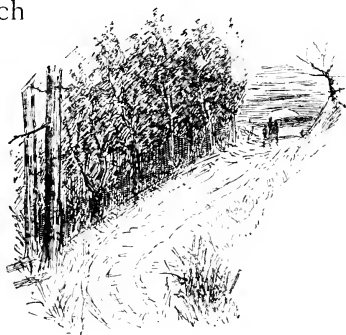
The traveller laughed and held out the posy, to show off its beauties.

"I think they are lovely, Mademoiselle," he said.

Mademoiselle nodded graciously, and they all three went down the laurel-walk and out of the gate, which the Princess opened with her big key. There sat the blue Dragon, stately and grim in the moonlight, with the dew glittering on his terrible wings, and a moonbeam lying right across his nose. He made no attempt to devour the traveller, he did not even move his gaping jaws; but the Princess seemed to think it necessary all the same to hold up her tiny forefinger in warning and say, "Quiet there!" in an imperious tone.

This danger passed, they went along the lane and down the hill and up again, till, by various twists and turns, they arrived at the Rue de la Courte Côte. They did not talk much on the way. There seemed a silver silence shed by the moon over everything. The golden lake and the fiery sky were pale and still, and the masts in the harbor looked like the shadows of thin ghosts. The Enchanted City was asleep, and down below the sea murmured a quiet lullaby.

"Good-night," said Virginie, when they had reached the hotel, and stood on the steps waiting for the door to open. "I wish you good luck, Mon-



sieur, and that your good mother may recover, — and I hope you will be happy.”

“ Good-by ! ” cried the Princess, “ don’t forget to put the roses in water ; and remember about the Apples of Life. You need not be afraid of the Dragon, for I am nearly always at the gate watching for the King, and for stray travellers. You will not forget ? ”

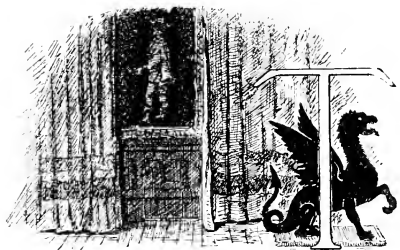
“ No,” he said, standing with bared head to bid them good-by, “ I will not forget. And I thank you both very much for your help, and for the roses.”

When they reached the end of the street, and glanced back, he was still standing on the step with the roses in his hand. He looked after them as they went down the hill,

in the moonlight, Virginie straight and slim, and the Princess in her quaint, green gown, and felt quite a poet and an artist, — in spite of the parchment.



CHAPTER III.

WHY THE BLUE DRAGON LEFT THE
CHÂTEAU DE LAURIENNE.

WENTY years ago the Blue Dragon had sat in state, keeping guard over the treasures in

the drawing-room of the Château de Laurienne. He had a right to his position; for he had been presented to the grandfather of M. le Comte by an English duke, for some service rendered by the Frenchman in his youth. Then

his blue coat had been spangled with golden stars and moons, but now the gilt had rubbed off even from his fierce talons. Still he was very handsome, and very aristocratic, and more than that he was the gift of a duke.

The drawing-room was half in gloom, for the green shutters were down in the veranda, and the sunlight could only filter in through chinks and crevices. It flickered across the soft carpet, and gilded the edges of the Louis Quinze furniture, and lost itself among the folds of silken curtains. Through the cool darkness floated the scent of roses, and the faint fragrance of pot-pourri.

But though the green shutters could keep out the sunshine, they could not keep out the sound of angry voices, nor the tramp of footsteps hurriedly pacing the terrace outside. M. le Comte and

his only son were quarrelling; the Blue Dragon knew all about it for he had seen them go out across the veranda with hot, angry faces, and now he could almost hear what they said. He even knew more about it than they did themselves; for he knew how it would end, and they did not. He had seen one or two family quarrels in his lifetime, and was wise in such matters. One does not live a hundred and twenty years without learning something, and by this time the Blue Dragon was pretty well acquainted with the De Laurienne temperament.

It was the old story, for history repeats itself, though every one thinks his own love tale a new one. Young François de Laurienne had fallen in love with the daughter of an apple-farmer; her father's name was Petit,

and hers was Juliette. Now Petit may be a very good name, but it has not a De to it; and then there were the apple-orchards! Sometimes the aristocrat has a long pedigree, and the bourgeois has a long purse; then the De and the money agree, and it is a good match. But here there was neither De nor money, only a respectable surname, and half-a-dozen acres or so of apple-orchards; so that it was quite out of the question that Juliette Petit should ever become Juliette de Laurienne.

Thus argued M. le Comte. Not so his son,—far from being out of the question, it was the very way to set matters right. Once she was Juliette de Laurienne, there was no need whatever for the old name; and if that were objectionable, there was all the more reason for changing it. As for the apple-

orchards, — they could stay where they were, and the farmer too. He did not want them, he only wanted Juliette.

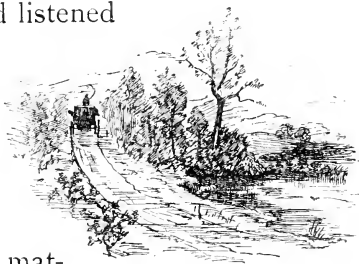
As to whether the farmer had an opinion in the matter neither of the two cared; and François knew quite well what pretty Juliette thought. He had known so ever since the last apple-harvest, when they had looked at the moon through the orchard-boughs, and divided a Normandy pippin between them. He knew too, that she was sweet and true and gentle enough to be the mistress of half-a-dozen Châteaux de Laurienne.

But M. le Comte did not care in the least about harvest moons and true-love promises; he cared about family pride, and the family purse, and had an eye to the advantages of marrying his son to a distant cousin, the daughter of a

certain baron with a long pedigree and a well-filled coffer.

So they were quarrelling furiously, that summer afternoon, on the terrace, and the Dragon sat in the drawing-room and listened to them.

It all ended as he had foreseen. François de Laurienne the younger took mat-



ters into his own hands, and rode away with pretty Juliette one early autumn morning before the dew had dried upon the orchard boughs. François de Laurienne the elder did not ride after them ; he waited till Juliette Petit was Juliette de Laurienne, and then he quietly disinherited his son, and forbade him ever to set foot within the Château.

So before the gloss had worn off the wedding gown, young Monsieur and Madame found themselves penniless, without a home, and without the means of making one. Happily for them, if somewhat unfortunately for himself, old Petit had indulged sometime since in a foolish speculation; for, on the persuasion of a fellow farmer, he had bought an old house which his friend owned at St. Servans. This house had proved as complete a failure to old Petit as it had to his friend; for, from some cause or other, no one had ever been induced to take it, and it seemed very likely that no one ever would.

Now, however, kind-hearted Monsieur Petit rejoiced in his dismal purchase, and offered the old place, rent-free, to the young couple. They could tidy it up, he said, and make the bit of garden

pay; and as the house was larger than they needed, he suggested summer boarders as a nice, easy means of livelihood. Now all this sounds delightful, and François and Juliette thanked the good old farmer with tears in their eyes, and looked forward to an Arcadian existence, rendered remunerative by a kitchen-garden and summer boarders.

For the first two years all went happily. Old Petit came over from Normandy to do up the garden himself, and provided a superannuated couple, whom he had picked up on his way, as boarders. At the end of that time, the ancient couple dying and ceasing to require summer lodgings, the rooms became empty once more; and François, who was not cut out for a gardener, and had contrived to kill nearly all his plants, gave up the kitchen-garden in despair.

Juliette took it all very cheerfully, and even tried to make out that the sudden termination of business was to their advantage.

"You know, François," she said, looking up at the empty windows, "Madame's sitting-room will make such a beautiful nursery for little Virginie; it is so light and airy. And the garden has got on so much better by itself. The apple-tree has blossomed wonderfully since you left off trying to graft pears on to it; and the gooseberry bushes are really beginning to bear fruit, now you let them grow naturally. It does n't do to experiment with things too much."

They struggled along, somehow, for half-a-dozen years after that, and managed to get a good deal of happiness out of their life, though it was not



“THE GARDEN HAS GOT ON SO MUCH BETTER BY ITSELF.”

quite Arcadian. François gave lessons in painting and drawing at the schools in St. Servans, for he had a talent for art, and had spent many of his courting days sketching Juliette in the orchard or dairy. Those little pictures he sold now, not without a heartache; but one must live somehow, and he still had the original. Once or twice old Petit came over from Normandy, and made a summer boarder of himself. At these periods the garden sprang into vegetables and fruit as if by magic; and if the kind old man could not find a market for the produce, he bought it himself and made a present of it to Juliette.

All these years they had not heard from the angry old Count, and François, who inherited the De Laurienne pride, among other estimable qualities, had never been near the Château, nor asked

for help, even in his greatest need. They heard of M. le Comte from Petit, who was no longer honored with the Château custom, and did not want it. The old nobleman, who had grown harder and prouder than ever, lived on at Laurienne in solitary grandeur, and never mentioned his son to any one; but Petit thought his health was breaking up, and that the lonely, loveless life was wearing his heart away.

“Ah! le pauvre grandpère!” murmured Juliette, smoothing little Virginie’s soft hair; “What a dull, cold life for him, my François! After all, we are richer than he; we have our laughter and our tears, but there are three to laugh and cry, and the *bon* papa to pet us all!”

It was about this time that François won the favor of an eminent designer,

under whom he had given lessons at the School of Art, and he obtained well-paid commissions. His designs were bold and original, and pleased the firm for whom they were undertaken, so he was entrusted with many of their orders, and began to make a name for himself. Later on he was taken on as travelling partner, and though this entailed long and frequent absence from home, Juliette was too glad of his success to demur.

When Virginie was thirteen, another little maiden appeared at "Les Lauriers," and Madame's sitting-room was once again turned into a nursery, and Virginie installed as nurse. Old Petit was growing infirm, and could no longer take such long journeys, even to see his little new granddaughter; but from time to time they received a big hamper,

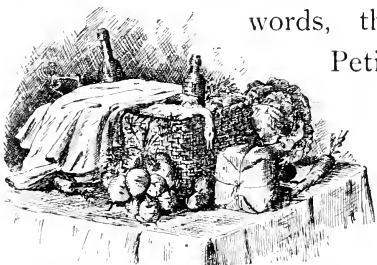
filled with good things from dairy and orchard, accompanied by a letter in faint, cramped writing, stiffly worded and curiously spelt.

When little Marie Juliette could totter about among the roses and prattle to "maman" in newly learnt words, they heard from

Petit that M. le Comte was dead.

Heard too, that his will, dated from that autumn day on

which father and son had parted, bore no mention of François. Everything had been left to the daughter of the rich baron, the fine cousin whom François ought to have married. That she had long since become La Baronne de Valmency, and did not need it, only made



the will seem more unjust; it did not alter it.

François was furious. He did not believe it; so he wrote to the executors, — there was a later will he was sure. It was impossible that an old quarrel should so influence his father that after all these years he should be left with absolutely nothing.

“Oh, no,” replied the executors, pleasantly, “there was certainly something.” On his death-bed the old Count had murmured uneasily of “old times,” and “François.” Going to his side they had asked: what was his wish? The shadow of death was already upon him; he moved his head and tried to speak, but it was too late.

“François — the Blue Dragon —” was all they heard.

The Blue Dragon, therefore, was care-

fully packed and despatched with mock ceremony, and the executor's compliments, to St. Servans. "They supposed it was an heirloom; it was very handsome. Oh, yes, that was certainly something!"

Poor François was terribly angry, and not a little hurt. The porter left the Blue Dragon at the gate; and the new owner would not touch it, nor allow it to be taken up to the house. Juliette shed a few pitiful tears over the lonely old man's memory, as she took away the wrappings of the fierce-eyed monster; but her husband only regarded it with angry contempt. "If it were stolen," he said, "so much the better. It was an insult, and a laughing-stock. Let it go."

But it never was stolen, any more than the stone vases on the gate-posts; and by-and-by the grass and weeds

grew about it, and the pumpkin-vine enwreathed it, and passers-by looked upon it as some new-fashioned garden ornament. In spite of these indignities, the Blue Dragon held up his head and glared as fiercely as ever. They might leave him to the mercy of sun and rain; but all the same he had sat in a count's drawing-room, and he was the gift of a duke.

The only person to whom his arrival afforded any consolation was Marie Juliette. In some childish illness Virginie had read to her, over and over, a book of fairy tales, and these had fastened upon her baby brain in a manner peculiar to the De Lauriennes, who when once they had got an idea into their heads could never get it out.

Henceforth the little maid lived in a world of her own. She was no

longer Marie Juliette de Laurienne, she was an Enchanted Princess, and "Les Lauriers" was an Enchanted Castle. No longer were her parents "papa" and "maman," they were the King and Queen deprived of their lawful dignity by the same spell which made her an Enchanted Princess, and constituted the Dragon her keeper.

Virginie had escaped the transforming process, partly perhaps because she was too thoroughly and indispensably a part of the little maiden's every-day life to be any one else than Virginie, and partly because as nurse and teacher her duties often made it necessary to break into the day-dream in which her charge was absorbed.

"It is time for bed, Juliette," or "Come and get ready for tea," were words which broke the spell of fairyland

and obliged the Princess to bid farewell to her faithful Dragon, and submit to the indignities of evening bath or brush and comb.

But nothing struck such blank despair into the heart of the royal maiden as the summons to lessons.

When she heard the clear call echoing down the laurel-walk: "Aux leçons, leçons, ma Marie Juliette!" the Princess would whisper a sad adieu in the ear of her dear Blue Dragon, and leave a tear shining on his gorgeous head, while she walked slowly away to meet Virginie's coaxing face, and the big brown A B C book with its moral stories and long, thin lines of spelling.

Once free from the influence of "La Fille Diligente," or "Le Méchant Garçon," the Princess would fly to her monster and spend hours beside him,

with the book of fairy tales on her knee, and her fingers wreathing flowers for his adornment.

“Beauty and the Beast,” her father called them; and very often a friendly pupil, walking home with him in the evening, would pause to sketch the pair, while François looked on or gave a helping hand.

“What do you do all day, Beauty?” asked one kind student who had given her his sketch. “Don’t you find it dull down here by the gate?”

“I watch for the King,” answered the Princess, with grave condescension, “and for travellers who have lost their way looking for the Tree of Life. I keep the key, and the Dragon guards the gate. No one can enter if I am not here, for he would devour them.”

When the winter came, the Princess

did not desert her post, though she could no longer sit among the pumpkin-leaves. She was allowed to run up and down the laurel-walk with her little hoop or her skipping rope, and when the snow came she built a beautiful white castle round the Dragon, and snowballed him till the walls fell in. Even on wet days the King carried her down, wrapped in his great-coat, to kiss her hand to the china monster.

So the poor Blue Dragon, though neglected and despised by every one else, had opened up a beautiful world for little Marie Juliette,—a world in which she lived as happy as the day was long.

But no one need be surprised at that; for was he not the gift of a duke?

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE TREE OF LIFE.



BEFORE the Apples of Life had turned to gold, the traveller came again to the Enchanted Castle. He came to return the Princess's little handkerchief, the one in which she had bound up his hand when he tore it getting through the sweetbrier hedge.

The Princess was at the gate as usual, singing to the Dragon in a clear, shrill treble.

“Petite Bo Boutons
A perdu ses moutons — ”

But when she saw the traveller at the gate, she broke off her song, and ran to let him in.

“Why have you come so soon?” she called out. “The apples are not ripe yet. I said, ‘When the King comes,’ but it wants two weeks and four days to that.”

“Yes, I remember what you told me; but I have not come for the apples. I have come to bring back your handkerchief; and here is something for you. It comes straight from fairyland.”

It was a book of French fairy-tales, those charming fairy-tales of Madame d’Aulnoy, bound in red and gold, and beautifully illustrated. The Princess sat down on the gravel-walk to undo the wrappers, and gave a little scream of delight.

“Oh, how beautiful! And the pic-

tures are painted, and the edges are gold! Oh, what a charming traveller you are! And here is something written, — what does it say?”

“‘To Mademoiselle Marie Juliette de Laurienne, from her sincere friend, Godfrey Traverse.’ Is that right?”

“Oh, quite right!” said the Princess, who would not have known had it been wrong; “but who is Godfrey Traverse?”

“I am —” he began, then seeing the look of disappointment in the dark eyes raised to his, — “why! — don’t you like it?”

“It is a very nice name,” she said slowly, unwilling to offend him; “but — but the travellers are always called Cheri or Charmant, and then they turn out to be princes. I am sorry your name is not Charmant. I always said you were a prince in disguise; but the

Queen said there is no disguise about Englishmen; they cannot keep it up. Are you a prince in disguise?"

"No, I am afraid not," he said laughing; "the Queen is quite right."

"Then you must be a knight," said Marie Juliette, turning the leaves of her fairy-tale book; "the knights never put on disguise, they fought the Dragons, and—oh, I *do* hope you won't begin to fight the Dragon! You will never bring your sword here, will you? Please, please don't!"

"No, no, I am quite safe. I promise you I will never fight your Dragon. But how long are you going to sit in the dust?"

"It is so delightful to have a quite new fairy-book!" she cried, lifting her April face, all smiles now, as she jumped up and led his willing steps along the

laurel-walk. "The old one was Virginie's, and so many of the leaves were loose. And there was a big hole in the cover, where Virginie dropped it in the grate once, while she was watching my tisane when I was ill."

The Enchanted Castle looked much the same as on that evening when the traveller had first walked up to it in the sunset light. The long, thin finger of the sun-dial pointed to noon; and the swallows and pigeons were evidently taking a siesta, for only the bees hovered lazily about the roses.

They avoided the sweetbrier hedge, and went round the house by a little path, overshadowed by lilac bushes, which brought them to the back-door. Now, as then, it stood open, and from within came the savory smell of *pot-au-feu*, and the suggestive clatter of

plates. As they approached, the tortoise-shell cat came leaping down the steps, followed by an imperative "Shoo! shoo!" and the whisk of a white apron, and the next moment Virginie appeared in the doorway, a basin and knife in her hand, and her apron full of vegetables.



"Ah, it is Monsieur?" she cried brightly, putting down the basin and knife, and giving him her hand. "It is well, Monsieur, that you were not on the step a little sooner; you would have got the corner of my apron in your face, instead of that naughty Mimi! She has been trying to steal our dinner!"

Here the Princess interposed with her present, which, after it had been

duly admired, she carried off to show the Queen; and Virginie sat down on the wooden bench, and opened her apron, displaying a heap of amber carrots, russet potatoes, and long French beans.

“Will you not rest, Monsieur?” she said, clearing a place for him; “it is warm, although it is late in September, and you have had a long walk.”

Monsieur sat down and watched her, as, with deft fingers, she peeled the potatoes and threw them into the bowl.

“Can I not help you?” he asked, feeling quite idle beside all this brisk business, and wishing he had something to do with his hands.

“If Monsieur likes, he may hold the pie-dish, — so,” said Virginie, adjusting it, — “while I scrape the carrots. That is division of labor.”

“CAN I NOT HELP YOU ? ” HE ASKED.”



"One-sided labor, I think. Let me do that for you."

"Oh, no!" replied Virginie, shaking her head till the curls fell over her eyes and she had to push them back; "you would not do it at all nicely, and you would be so slow. Men are poor cooks."

"But your best cooks are men," objected the traveller, watching the little yellow shavings curl round her quick, sharp knife.

"Ah, yes, but they are French; you are an Englishman."

Evidently they had a poor opinion of Englishmen in the Enchanted Castle.

"And when do you start for Normandy, Monsieur?" went on Virginie. "You will perhaps get there just in time for the apple-harvest. That would be charming."

"I go to-morrow," he said; "I have settled the papers, and now I am the possessor of a little farm, and an orchard or two. I hope to get my mother there by November."

"So soon? That will be nice for you both. And you will keep her company?"

"Yes," he said, looking away into the clear blue sky, through the branches of the apple-tree; "I will stay with her, — it will not be for long."

Virginie did not speak. She followed his glance, and gazed thoughtfully at the stretch of azure flecked with tiny, white clouds. Through the noonday hush came the faint chirrup of a cricket hidden in the grass. Only that broke the silence till the traveller spoke again.

"Your little sister has promised me some of the Apples of Life," he said

smiling. "It is a pretty fancy of hers; but I think for some of us they never ripen, — only hang out of reach on the tree, dazzling our eyes like the fruit of Tantalus."

"Oh, no," said Virginie, gently, "I am sure every one has a share in the harvest. Sometimes it is late."

She had taken some bean-pods into her hand and was paring them, drawing off the skin in long green threads.

"Perhaps," she said, looking up with a soft light in her eyes, "your mother is going to gather her harvest, Monsieur, in the Garden of Paradise."

"Perhaps," he said more hopefully, "thank you, Mademoiselle Virginie."

"There, I have finished. Merci, Monsieur! Now we will go to the mother; she will be pleased to see you."

They went into the big, airy kitchen, — the traveller supposed it was a kitchen because there was a little army of saucepans on the fire, and a tall dresser stood opposite, laden with blue and white china. Virginie threw her vegetables into the largest saucepan, and went to another door, calling to her mother to come and see “Monsieur l’Anglais.”

Madame came running from somewhere upstairs, with a feather-broom in her hand, and a duster over her arm. She welcomed “Monsieur l’Anglais” with effusion, and asked him to stay to lunch, — an invitation which Marie Juliette imperatively echoed.

“You must stay, my knight!” she cried, pulling him toward the table. “See! I have set a place for you; and there is Mimi, keeping your chair. You must stay!”

“Tais toi, Mariette!” cried Madame, “Be more polite, and do not say ‘must’! It is for Monsieur to decide; and perhaps he does not like *pot-au-feu*?”

The traveller looked at Virginie, as though doubtful of the etiquette observed in an Enchanted Castle. She was cutting a long loaf, using the broad window-sill as a sideboard, and paused to divide the crust before she looked up with a smile.

“Stay, Monsieur,” she said, “and help to eat the vegetables, as you helped to prepare them.”

So Monsieur stayed, and felt himself drawn deeper and deeper into the spell of enchantment every moment. He thought he had never tasted anything half so delicious as the homely bouillon, which the Queen served out of an earthenware bowl; perhaps it was be-

cause he had helped Virginie prepare it, — at least, so she said, though he had only held the pie-dish. As for the sweet cider brought out in his honor, he could never remember such a flavor in the old port at home; and the brown bread and honey which Virginie put on his plate, might have been ambrosia served by a French Hebe.

But everything must have an end, even in an Enchanted Castle, and the traveller sat in the window-seat and read fairy-tales to the Princess, while Virginie cleared away and washed up the dishes. He was glad that Madame kept up a running accompaniment of small-talk while she moved to and fro, for his pronunciation was not Parisian, and the Princess was continually correcting it, pointing out his faults with alarming candor.

In the midst of "La Chatte Blanche," Mimi leaped suddenly onto the sill, and put a soft paw right across the page; and as she refused to go away, the reading came to an end, much to the relief of the poor traveller.

"Monsieur Traverse," said Madame, coming up with a pretty pleading in her eyes, and clasped hands, "Virginie tells me you start for my country to-morrow. Ah, if Monsieur would deliver a little remembrance to the *bon* papa for me! A winter wrap I have made, and some of Virginie's honey, — so good for the cough from which he suffers! I wish so much to send a little token, and I cannot afford the post."

She made her request, and the innocent avowal of their poverty, so simply and frankly, that Monsieur felt ready to do anything in his power, and promised

to deliver any number of messages and souvenirs.

“Ah, but he was too good! I will write a letter, and perhaps Monsieur would stay to tea? That would give her so much pleasure, and the little parcel should be quite ready by then.”

Monsieur accepted with pleasure, and Madame, after bidding Virginie entertain their guest, went upstairs to pour out her love and anxiety to the good old father whose health was failing.

“Come out,” said the Princess, climbing down from the window-seat with Mimi in her arms, “let us go and sit under the Tree of Life, and count the apples that are nearly ripe. Come then, Virginie will be ready soon, and then she will bring her sewing out there, — won’t you, Virginie?”

“But, yes — I will join you!”

said Virginie, brightly, "only Marie Juliette must not fatigue Monsieur Traverse to read any more. It is hard for him, the French language; that I can see."

Monsieur Traverse laughed, and followed the Princess out and across the lawn to the apple-tree. He lifted her onto a moss-grown branch, "So high," the little maiden said, "I can almost catch the clouds that come sailing down to look through the branches." But Mimi went up even higher, and sat far out of reach, watching the swallows.

Presently Virginie came out with her sewing, some light-checked print she was making into shirts for the King, — so the Princess volunteered, — and sat on a lower branch with her cotton and scissors in her lap, while the traveller

lay in the long grass beneath and looked up at them.

"We are out of your reach!" laughed little Marie Juliette, clapping her hands, and peeping down from her leafy bower. "Mimi and Virginie and I! We are three princesses, and we sit up here with the Golden Apples, out of your reach!"

"Yes, you are out of my reach," he said, laughing back; but he sighed too.

"But you can climb," said the Princess, as though in challenge. "The Prince had to climb, you know, before he got the apples; but first there was the golden ring."

"And what did he do with the ring?" asked the traveller, gently waving a faded leaf to and fro to keep off the tiny gnats, who were holding a carnival down there in the grass.

“ He gave it to the Princess — oh! Mimi! Look out for yourself! — Mimi is coming!”

Mimi leaped skilfully from one bough to another, and down into the soft grass with a spring, for her quick eyes had caught the moving leaf, and she pounced upon it at once.

“ There is one Princess for you!” cried Marie Juliette. “ But we will not come down, Virginie and I. You must climb for us and for the Golden Apples too.”

But the traveller did not climb. He looked at Virginie’s face, bent over her work, with the shadows of the leaves dancing on her hair, and playing about her dress. He was wondering why she was so silent.

“ How dull you are!” cried the Princess, from her perch above. “ You are

a knight,—tell us about your adventures. How many maidens have you rescued?”

“None at all,” said the knight; “but I have lived in a country far away, and seen giant forests, and birds of red-and-gold. Shall I tell you about those?”

“Yes, do! Lift me down, so that I may hear you; but don’t crumple Virginie’s work.”

So he lifted her down and sat her in the grass beside him, with Mimi in her lap, while he told tales of Australian life, in the best French he could muster. The Princess corrected his mistakes, and Virginie listened as she sewed.

When they had exhausted the wonders of Australia, he told them another story. Rather a sad story of the terrible tropical fever, and of a happy family that had grown very small now, and of two travellers who came over the sea to

England, and of one traveller who was dying.

“ Mais que c'est triste ! ” sighed the Princess, when this story ended. She was sorry it was so sad ; she liked better to hear about the fields where one picked up gold, and the forests full of beautiful birds. But I think Virginie thought the other story the most interesting, though she did not say so. She only looked thoughtfully up at the little white clouds for a moment, with her hands clasped over the checked shirt ; and then she stood up and gathered her work together.

“ It is nearly tea-time,” she said. “ Will Monsieur excuse me while I set the table ? ”

And without waiting for an answer, she went into the house.

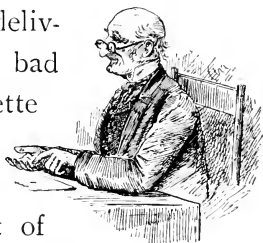
Madame was there in a little flutter

of excitement, when the Princess and her friend made their appearance at the tea-table. She had her little gifts and the long letter quite ready, and had many directions to give, as to the whereabouts of the farm, and the habits of the farmer, and also a little word of introduction for the benefit of Monsieur l'Anglais, to whom she hoped the *bon* papa might be of service.

“For he is of great experience, and could advise well concerning this little property, — as Monsieur might be taken in, if left to himself.”

Monsieur, secretly amused at the idea of a barrister being taken in by a few French peasants, thanked her politely, put the letter into his pocket, and turned his attention to the excellent coffee and hot meal-cakes, which Madame dispensed as she talked. The

Princess, perched upon her high-chair, and Virginie, who sat opposite, kept up a brisk fire of laughing chatter, and between them the traveller felt quite boyish, and even ventured on a few jokes of his own, delivered in such ludicrously bad French that Marie Juliette shrieked with delight, and even Madame, though distressed at such a want of courtesy, could not help a smile.



“Monsieur will improve,” said Virginie, laughingly, as she sugared his coffee, “when he finds himself with strangers on this journey. But I think, among the bourgeoisie at least, he had better not venture on jokes. It might be — embarrassing.”

Later on, with Madame’s gifts in his hands, her letter in his pocket, and her

kindly farewell ringing in his ears, the traveller left the Enchanted Castle and once again walked down to the gate, escorted by Virginie and the Princess. There sat the Blue Dragon in a fiery glow of sunset radiance, encircled by the hairy arms of the pumpkin-vine. The Princess thought he glared at the traveller more fiercely than ever, or was it the red sun shining in his eyes?

“Good-by, my knight,” she said, holding open the gate for him to pass out, “tell us, when you come back, if you have rescued any distressed maidens on the road to Normandy.”

“Ah, yes, Monsieur Traverse,” said Virginie, holding out her hand, “you will come and see us again, will you not? Just to tell us of your little home, and how you find *le bon grandpère*.”

"I should be only too glad!" replied the traveller, trying to manipulate the parcels so as to take off his hat and shake hands without letting them fall into the road. "I cannot thank you enough for having made my stay here so —"

"Mais, non!" laughed Virginie, "you really cannot thank us — so do not try. Look to your French, Monsieur, and when you return we will have some more — how do you say — needles."

He was in the road now, had turned to go, and looked back as he heard the iron gate snap to, and the key grate in the rusty lock. There was the Princess on tip-toe, laughing through the bars, and beside her, tall enough to catch the rosy sunset-flush on her face and on the soft folds of her muslin scarf, stood

Virginie. Behind them both sat the Dragon, with outstretched wings.

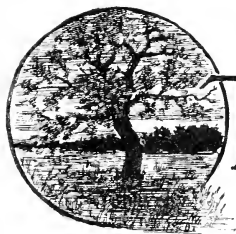
“Adieu!” cried Virginie, waving her scarf, and “Adieu!” the Princess echoed.

“Adieu!” said the traveller, baring his head; and then he walked slowly along the lane, and out of sight of the Enchanted Castle.



CHAPTER V.

HOW THEY FOUND THE TREASURE THAT
WAS GUARDED BY THE DRAGON.



THE storm has not broken the Tree of Life!" cried the Princess, joyously, "it only looks more beautiful still, all wet and shining, and I can see the Golden Apples through the leaves! Ah, *cher* papa! may I not go out and gather one, to see if they are quite ripe?"

She sat in the window-seat, looking out onto the wind-swept garden, fresh

and green and wet after the storm of last night, — one of those late thunderstorms that come at the end of September, as though summer were leaving in a burst of tears, after lingering as long as she could to be at last driven out by scolding autumn.

The wind-shaken fruit-trees rustled gently in the clear morning air, shaking down a shower of rain-drops with every little breeze ; the grass was strewn with a gorgeous mosaic of fallen leaves, — scarlet and gold and bronze, — with here and there a russet pear, or a ripe, green fig, and the apple-tree stood in the midst, showing through a thin veil of glowing leaves its wealth of ruddy gold.

The Princess laughed with delight as she caught sight of the ripe fruit, from her seat in the window. Had

they not put on their golden dress to welcome the King? — the King who had come home last night, all through the cold and the rain. She turned a pleading face to François, and climbing down from the sill, ran to clasp her hands about his arm and pulled him to the door.

“Say it then! Ah, say I may run out to see if the apples are quite ripe! For you know — the traveller comes to-morrow!”

François looked down at the wet grass, and up at the wet trees, and then into his little daughter's face.

“No, *mignonne*, see the grass is soaked with rain. This afternoon, perhaps, it will have dried up, for the sun is shining now, — but not this morning, *petite*.”

The Princess sighed, and looked up

with wistful eyes at the swallows darting to and fro against the clear blue of the autumn sky. Happy swallows! They need not stay at home this lovely morning, because the grass was wet; ah, if she had but wings like theirs, and could float and flutter in the sunshine!

But she laughed the next moment, for there was poor Mimi, mewling distressfully as she picked her way daintily through the long grass, lifting first one wet paw and then the other, and shaking the rain-drops from her whiskers in evident disgust. Mimi and the Princess were companions in misfortune; they would go indoors together till the world outside was dry.

“*Bien, mignonne!*” said François, as she turned, still laughing, and stepped across the threshold, followed by Mimi.

“Come and see my sketches, and I will tell you stories of the fisher-girls of Boulogne, and of the pretty boutonnières one meets in Paris; and when you are tired of pictures, we will read some of that wonderful fairy-book of yours — eh?”



“Mais,
oui! ça
sera charmant!”

cried the Princess, clapping her hands; and soon she was deep in the delights of her father’s big sketch-book. Mimi and the wet garden, and even the Apples of Life, for the time forgotten.

But only for the time. When dinner was over, and François sat in the window peeling a fig for her especial benefit, Marie Juliette renewed her entreaties,

“Just to go and look at the Golden Apples! See how the sun shines, and the grass does not look so very wet, and you can carry me to the apple-tree! Ah, yes, Papa!”

Her persuasions at length prevailed, and François lifted her to his shoulder and carried her across the lawn to the Tree of Life. Ah, happy Princess! How smooth and yellow shone the apples, how sweet they smelled! How the birds sang, and the sunlight danced on the leaves, and the swallows shot past like silver arrows, and the white pigeons cooed in the sun! All the world was rejoicing because the Golden Apples were ripe; but the Blue Dragon did not know yet. Quick as thought, she freed herself from the supporting arm and wriggled to the ground.

“Ah, my poor Dragon! He is left out in the cold; he does not know. He has guarded the Apples of Life, oh, so long and so patiently, and now they are ripe, and I must tell him, *mon cher*! I must! I will run down the laurel-walk where the gravel dries so quickly, you know. I shall not get my shoes wet; let me go to the dear Blue Dragon!”

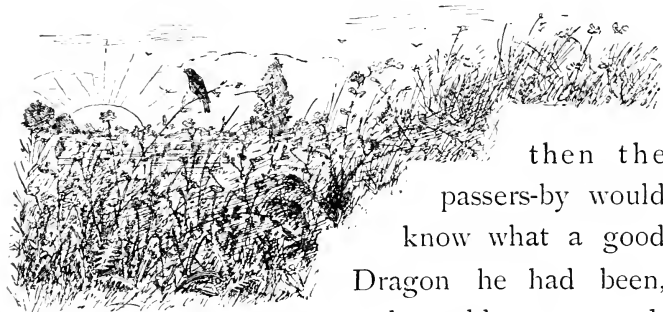
“*Méchante!*” laughed François; but he did not demur, and watched the little figure flit round the house, and dart through the hedge of sweetbrier.

The Princess ran on down the drive; the rose-bushes, beaten down by the rain, hung wet and sweet-scented over the path, and the gravel was strewn with crimson petals. All the garden was a world of flowers and sunlight and song, and the Princess sang the sweetest of all, in a clear, little treble, push-

ing back the rose sprays, as she danced along.

“À mon beau château,
L'on y danse, l'on y danse !
Et moi, je suis la plus gaie,
La plus gaie fillette en France !”

How glad the Blue Dragon would be!
She would deck him with roses, and



then the
passers-by would
know what a good
Dragon he had been,
and would stop to ad-
mire him. So she filled the skirt of
her little green gown with the fresh,
damp blossoms and hastened on.

“À mon beau château,
L'on y chante, l'on y chante !

‘Chantons ! dansons ! la vie
Est tout à fait charmante !’
Tra, la, la ! tra, la, la !”

Ah, happy Princess !

Down the laurel-walk where the birds
were singing, through the tangled thicket
of the pumpkin-vine, and then, —

Alas, for the Princess ! Alas, for the
Blue Dragon !

Under a heap of stone fragments,
battered and broken, he lay — headless !
The storm that had passed harmless
over the Tree of Life, had killed the
Blue Dragon. The wild wind of last
night had blown down one of the old
stone vases from the gateway right
onto the poor china monster, and there
they both lay in ruins among the pump-
kin-leaves.

The Princess stood for a moment
gazing with wide-open eyes upon the
scene of destruction. It seemed too ter-

rible to believe! Then she plunged into the long, wet grass and threw herself down beside the body of the poor Dragon in a storm of grief. The roses fell from her gown and lay on the ground forgotten; the birds in the laurel-walk seemed to sing no longer, only to cut the clear air with shrill cries, and a cloud blew up out of the west and hid the sun. But these changes did not surprise the Princess, they seemed rather in keeping with her sorrow, and she felt that earth and sky were mourning with her for the poor Blue Dragon.

So she lay there, prone upon the wet grass in the shadow of a broken wing, and gave herself up to her passionate grief. All the beautiful romance of fairy life seemed shut out from her experience. The Dragon had opened

the gates of fairyland, and now he was dead. She was no longer a Princess; her home was no longer an Enchanted Castle; the Tree of Life with its Golden Apples seemed but a poor pretence. The gold and the glitter had faded from everything; she was now only a lonely little girl in a very sad world, and the magician who had conjured up that old, delightful dream was but a blue china monster with a broken head.

“Where is the Princess, mon père?” cried Virginie, coming from the fire with the coffee-pot in her hands, as François walked into the kitchen at tea-time.

“The Princess? Why, — is n’t she here? Then she must be upstairs with that Mimi of hers. Call her.”

"But, no; she is not in the house. I thought you had been for a walk together."

"Where have your eyes been, little maid? I have been sitting on the bench under the window the whole afternoon, reading 'Le Figaro,' and yes, — I will confess, — I have been dozing too."

"And Marie Juliette?"

"Oh, now I remember. She ran to see her dear monster, only for a moment. Surely she is returned long ago, with Mimi as I tell you."

"Mais, non, here is Mimi. The Princess must be still in the garden — ah, quel dommage! and she with her little thin shoes! Run, cher papa, and call her in to tea."

François pocketed his paper, and walked leisurely out of the house and





"LYING FAST ASLEEP BESIDE HER FALLEN IDOL."

down the garden, still occupied with an art criticism in "Le Figaro," and not thinking much about the Princess, till he came upon her suddenly, lying fast asleep beside her fallen idol.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried with a start, "asleep in the wet grass, — and all this time! Peste! what a fool I have been!"

He strode through the pumpkin-leaves and stooped to wake her. Even in his anxiety the love of art came uppermost, and he paused a moment to admire the pretty picture, — the sleeping figure of the little Princess with the fallen roses massed in rich clusters against her faded green gown, her curly head thrown back against the wing of the blue monster, whose turquoise coloring lent sharp relief to the warm coloring of an oval cheek, still wet with tears.

"Tragedy and comedy," he muttered, smiling; and then he bent down and shook her gently.

"Wake, mignonne! wake, churette, and come to tea. Ah, how cold and wet my pretty bird is!"

The Princess opened her eyes with a half sob, and looked at him blankly. He raised her gently, and gave a glance at the headless body of the poor Blue Dragon. From the broken neck a corner of white paper projected; François pulled it out and opened a folded sheet, glancing carelessly down the page. The next moment he startled the Princess by calling out:—

"The will! Grand Dieu, the will!"

The words were as Greek to Marie Juliette, and when he caught her in his arms and strode up the drive, kissing and fondling her with broken exclama-

tions of joy and hope, she received his caresses in wondering silence. She was but half awake; the shadow of her loss loomed vaguely through the dream-world from which she was not wholly yet returned, still the shadow was there, growing more distinct each moment. And how could the King laugh and be so glad, while she lay in his arms, with a great sorrow at her heart and big, bitter tears on her lashes? As she dreamily wondered, they crossed the lawn, they were at the house, and there was *maman* to meet them.

“Ah, pauvrete! She will have taken cold, I fear,” began Madame, anxiously; but François cut her short by crying joyously, —

“The will, my Juliette, the will!”

“Hé, quoi!” cried Madame. “Whose will? What will? Where?”

“*His* will! — mon père — the Blue Dragon!” shouted De Laurienne; “and it is *I*, my Juliette, who am the heir, — it is *mine*, the château! Voilà the true will!”

Madame stood still on the doorstep, eyes and mouth wide open in surprise, half doubting her senses, half fearing for his. Was this a “poisson d’Avril?” No, it could not be; they were in sedate September yet, — then her face fell in pitying compassion.

“Hush, my poor François; it is the old will, it is of no use whatever.”

“Bah! Is it that you are deaf, Juliette; and that I am not a man to know what I am about? It is the latest will of all, — the *true* will!”

“Vrai-ment?” asked Madame, with cautious hesitation.

“Parbleu!” cried François, impatiently, “Suis-je fou?” Then he flung

an arm round the Queen's waist, and kissed her on both cheeks, "Vraiment, little wife! See — the day, the month, the year, — before he died he repented after all!"

"The saints be praised for that!" said Madame, devoutly.

"Amen!" cried Monsieur, laughing.

"But where — how did you get it, mon ami? Is it that they have written, — those lawyers from Laurienne?"

"No, no; but I understand — I see it all now. Ah, the poor father! Do you remember what he said when he was dying? 'François — the Blue Dragon —' I see it now."

"But I do not. Tell me, quick, François! I die of curiosity!"

"Why, the Blue Dragon is broken; the storm, you know — and stuffed down his throat — hidden away — was this!"

A wail of anguish startled them. The Princess, who had slipped to the ground, had been listening quietly; but the last words made clear that dull pain at her heart, and published abroad the cause of her sorrow. With a burst of tears she snatched at the paper held loosely in Madame's fingers, and flinging it to the ground, trampled upon it with passionate cries.

"Ah, le vilain! Mais que c'est méchant — cruel! Ah, le pauvre Dragon Bleu! Il lui a fait mourir!"

"Tais-toi, Juliette!" cried François, angrily, "see what you are doing! Stop — and take your naughty feet away!"

But the cry of baby despair went straight to Madame's heart, — even a Queen may be a mother, and have a mother's tender heart, — and she held

out her arms, with loving words of sympathy.

The Princess paused in her malicious little dance, and looked up, with one small foot still raised, the other set firmly on the crumpled paper.

"Come then, my Marie Juliette!" coaxed Madame, "Mother understands and is sorry! Mother knows all about it!"

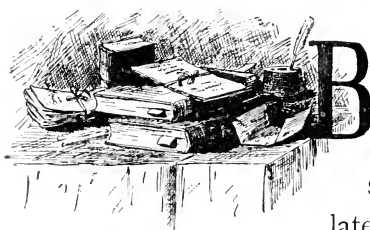
But Marie Juliette shook her head sadly, and brought down her foot in a final stamp, that left a stain of wet, green grass on the last clause of the will.

"No," she said with a little sob, "you *cannot* understand. You never had a Dragon!"

And with a pathetic air of sad superiority, she walked quietly into the house.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE PRINCESS MOURNED THE
FALLEN DRAGON.



BUT we are poor," said François, gloomily, as they sat at tea a little later, "who will undertake the suit for us? The Baron is avaricious; La Baronne will dispute our claim; and those sly foxes, the Laurienne lawyers, are too cunning to bite off their own heads! We have rank and wealth and crafty tongues against us."

“N’importe !” responded Madame, cheerily, “the right is on our side.”

“Pah, that goes for so much !” cried François, with a shrug and a snap of his fingers. “Might against right ; you know who goes into the corner.”

“But if we have the will, they cannot prove —”

“Oh, a lawyer can prove* anything !” said François.

“Bien !” cried Virginie, clapping her hands, and looking up with a bright, flushed face, “there is Monsieur Traverse, he is a lawyer ; he is our friend ; he will plead for us ! Voilà tout !”

“And who is this Traverse ?”

“A Monsieur anglais — the young lawyer —” began Madame ; but the Princess, who had been quietly eating her *soupe-au-lait*, interposed.

“He is not a lawyer,” she said ; “he is a knight.”

“So!” cried her father, laughing, “if we are to have a knight to fight our battles, all is sure to go well! He will enter the lists with a flourish of trumpets, and throw down his glove, like the brave knights of old. And with his good sword he will rescue the Princess, win back the castle, and slay the fierce Dragon!”

The smiles that had crept into Marie Juliette’s wide eyes, and dimpled her cheeks, died away, and a rush of tears came in their stead.

“The Dragon is dead!” she said with a catch in her voice and a brave endeavor to keep back the tears. She bent her head over her basin of bread and milk, and stared hard at the blue Chinaman walking up the side. But two drops trembled on her lashes, and fell into the bowl, and slid down the

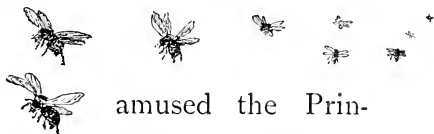
Chinaman's pigtail into the milk. They were very salt tears; but the Princess did not pause till she had emptied the basin, and then she looked up with a little forced smile.

"May I get down! *Please* let me go and call Mimi!"

Madame knew that Mimi was purring cosily under the table; but she had seen the struggle, and was pitiful. So she nodded, and the Princess folded her hands, and bent her curly head.

"Nous vous rendons grâces de tous vos bienfaits, O Dieu — ainsi soit-il," she said, in rather a hurry, and scrambled down from her high-chair, and out of the room. She climbed the stairs, holding her breath all the while to keep back the sobs. She was proud; she would not let them see her crying any more. She felt hot and ashamed

that they had seen so much already. How could they know, how could they understand all that the Blue Dragon had been to her? The King despised it; the Queen scarcely thought of it; Virginie — oh, yes! — Virginie thought it was a very good thing, because it



amused the Princess, — that was all.

But to her — oh, what the Blue Dragon had been to her!

When she had gained the nursery, the Princess knelt down by the low window-seat, laid her head on the broad ledge, and gave full vent to her grief. She did not notice the tiny pink roses that thrust their pretty, inquisitive faces round the lattice, and shook a few sympathetic drops upon her curls; she

did not hear the busy murmur of the bronze bees, nor look up when the swallows flashed past, with a sharp quiver of silver-lined wings. It was not till something soft and warm rubbed against her cheek that she raised her streaming eyes, and saw, through a mist of tears, a blurred picture of poor Mimi, walking round and round upon the sill.

“Oh, Mimi!” she cried sadly. “It is never, never, that you will be a beautiful princess, like ‘La Chatte Blanche’ — now. My pretty Mimi, I am so sorry for you! You must always be a poor little cat!”

Mimi arched her back, and rubbed her nose against her little mistress’s shoulder, and purred louder than ever. Perhaps she was thinking complacently of the mice that a princess could

never enjoy ; perhaps she had designs upon the swallows. But Marie Juliette thought she was trying to make the best of things, and patted her approvingly.

“You are very brave, my Mimi, I wish I could be brave!” she sighed, and just then she heard steps upon the stairs. Some one else had followed Mimi, and was close to the nursery door. The Princess climbed up onto the window-sill in a violent hurry, and began talking to her pet, very fast, and pointing down to the white pigeons in the garden.

The Queen came in, with Virginie behind her, and went over to the window.

“What, sitting in a draught!” she cried, “and such hot cheeks and hands—ah, I fear it is a bad cold that you have taken, mignonne, all out in the

wet grass! My love must go to bed, or she will be ill."

The Princess winked away a tell-tale tear, and stroked Mimi's fur assiduously. She submitted to the verdict of bed, and to the glass of orange water that Madame administered as a soothing draught, without a word. In silence she allowed herself to be undressed and put into her little white cot, by Virginie, who, smiling, bent to wish her a loving good-night.

"Sweet sleep and pleasant dreams, ma Marie Juliette!" she said, with a kiss, and then she moved quietly about the room, folding little clothes, and drawing the white curtains across the lattice.

The Princess lay quite still till Virginie had gone downstairs, and then she cried herself to sleep.

The morrow had decked itself out most charmingly, in blue and white, and smiles and sunshine. The morning breeze had kissed away all the tears of yesterday, and set the leaves a-quiver with delight, and the butterflies a-dancing to the music of the bees. And now it was late in the afternoon, and the breeze had fallen asleep, tired out with play, so that the rustling boughs no longer stirred the silence with leafy whispers, and the butterflies left off dancing and rested, perched among rose-leaves, or poised on the lavender spikes. Only the bees went on with their low, monotonous chorus, "Coming, come, come, com-ing!"

And the traveller was coming along the lane humming a tune, with a flower in his buttonhole. He was happy, though he could not have told you

why. Perhaps it was the sunshine,—or was it his new coat? Perhaps—but that was a secret that only his own heart guessed at; it was certainly not to be trusted to the bees or the roses, for they would tell the butterflies, and there is no keeping a secret with the butterflies,—the whole garden would know what was going on in less than no time.

So he passed them all by and made for the path under the lilacs. It would never do to spoil his “get up” by a scrimmage with the sweetbrier hedge. But as he crossed the lawn he heard a low murmur in the porch that could hardly come from the bees; it was a tone too high, and there was the pretty music of the French accent. The traveller listened and became more convinced, for the words he heard were set

to the tune of an old French song. He stepped a little nearer and listened more intently. Through the tangle of roses that clung about the porch came the murmur more distinctly, with the musical rise and fall of a girlish voice.

“ Si vous n’avez rien à me dire,
Pourquoi venir auprès de moi ? ”

He looked through the roses and saw the pink tip of an ear veiled in tendrils of dusky hair, and the soft contour of a cheek and chin. A blossom-dusted bee bounced out of a rose and buzzed about his face, as though resenting the intrusion, and he turned and made silent war against it with his pocket-handkerchief. Having routed the enemy, he stole once more to the lattice-work of leaf and flower, and listened with a smile. The pretty voice had wandered

now into the cooing sing-song of a lullaby.

“Do, do, bébé, do !

L'enfant dormira tantôt ! ”

“This is too bad !” thought the traveller, waking to the fact that his eaves-dropping might, perhaps, seem hardly fair to the unconscious singer. He brushed the leaves from his coat, and went quickly round to the front of the porch.

There sat Virginie with the Princess in her arms, gently rocking to and fro, her fingers busy with some knitting, while with one foot she kept time to the low music of her lullaby. The book of fairy-stories had fallen to the ground, and lay open in the sunshine with an earwig slowly crawling up the white margin. A shadow fell across the page, and Virginie looked up with

a little flush of surprise and a smile of welcome.

“Hush!” she said softly, with a finger on her lip; “the Princess is not well. She is so drowsy, and her cheeks are so hot, I am afraid she is going to be ill.”

“The Princess ill!” echoed the traveller. “Oh, that cannot be! She is tired perhaps with playing in the sun.”

“Ah, no, she has not played at all to-day. She has been fretting for the Blue Dragon,” said Virginie; and she told him of the broken plaything, and of the finding of the will. He listened gravely, leaning against the porch with his eyes fixed on the small black earwig travelling across the sunny page. Virginie wondered why he did not congratulate them, and said so.

“Oh, yes; I am glad,” said the trav-

eller, "it is great good fortune, Mademoiselle, for you."

But he thought that it was not at all good fortune for himself, he felt even sorry; and then he looked up penitently, and held out his hand.

"How selfish I am!" he said cheerfully, "a thousand congratulations, Mademoiselle! I am very glad for all your sakes."

He felt proud of himself after this little speech, and hoped that Virginie would notice the improvement in his French. But she was looking anxiously at the Princess.

"Pauvre petite!" she said softly. "Feel, Monsieur, how hot her forehead is."

She took his hand and laid it on the little white brow under the tumbled curls.

"Yes;" said Monsieur, then gently

touching with his finger the flushed cheek that rested on Virginie's shoulder, "I am afraid it is a bad chill, I think I should take her in, Mademoiselle."

"Yes; perhaps you are right," Virginie said, as she unclasped the hot hands from her neck and prepared to rise.

But the traveller bent down quickly, and took the Princess into his arms, saying, "Hush, hush!" as gently as a woman. Virginie picked up the fairy-tale book, shaking the earwig from its leaves, and led the way round by the lilac-shadowed path.

"I do not think we will attempt the sweetbrier hedge this time. Eh, Monsieur?" she said, looking back over her shoulder, with a gleam of roguish laughter in her eyes. And the traveller shook his head, laughing quietly, for

he was afraid of disturbing the Princess. The little cheek close to his was hot as fire, and the breath came quick and short through the dry, parted lips. He stepped so carefully that his charge was still asleep when they reached the kitchen, and Virginie held up a finger of warning to Madame, who met them with outstretched hands, and words of welcome. Her bright face grew anxious as the trio entered, and François, too, came forward with an air of concern.

“Oh, it is nothing,” said the traveller, reassuringly, “only Mademoiselle is a little feverish. A cold, you know, — I am sure it is only a cold !”

“Ah, François !” said the Queen, unconscious reproach in her voice, “that she should have lain so long in the wet grass yesterday ! The pity of it !”

“Tst! tst! why should you distress yourself?” rejoined the King, “she is flushed with her nap. See what a pretty study for ‘The Baby Sleep’ your English poet sings of, Monsieur.”

Monsieur looked ; but he did not think the coloring of a picture of sleep should be so feverishly brilliant, nor the blue shadows under the long lashes so dark. He transferred the little slumberer to Madame’s arms, and saw her carried off to the nursery with a sigh of relief.



“Mon ami, I wish to ask your advice on an affair of business. Can you spare me half an hour?” asked François, producing his cigarette-case. “We can have a chat and a smoke in

the garden, and perhaps you will give us your company to supper?" and the traveller, assenting, followed his host into the little orchard beyond the Tree of Life.

Here, while the sun dropped slowly from one white cloud peak to another, and the thin shadow crept as slowly round the dial, François told his story, and the young barrister listened, suggested, and advised. He did more, he promised to throw himself, head and heart, into their interests, and win — if steadfast will and tireless energy *could* win — their cause.

"As for your quick French tongue, — well the idioms puzzle me, to be sure; but I have studied lately, and improved, I will study more, and, if need be, employ an interpreter. Oh, I will get along well enough, and right *is* might, whatever cynics may aver!"

François laughed, and then looked grave again.

"But, my dear fellow, for you it is a risky undertaking, — there will be much dispute, and supposing we fail —" he paused. "No, it is hardly fair upon you. You see —" with a flush, — "I am as poor as a church-mouse."

"Bah!" cried the other, growing crimson too, "of what are you thinking? Am I a cringing parasite, plotting for my own ends, or am I your friend?"

"You are a true knight," smiled François, holding out his hand.

"Thank you. And true knights fought for love, not lucre."

"So? Then, Sir Knight, when shall we open the campaign?" asked François, touched by the young fellow's honest kindliness, yet glad to leave an embarrassing subject.

"At once. Let us lose no time and start for Laurienne to-morrow."

"Bien, mon ami, you are red hot! You will burn a hole in their parchment —"

"Let us hope it won't all end in smoke!" laughed the true knight, extinguishing his cigarette; "see, there is Mademoiselle Virginie, beckoning us in."

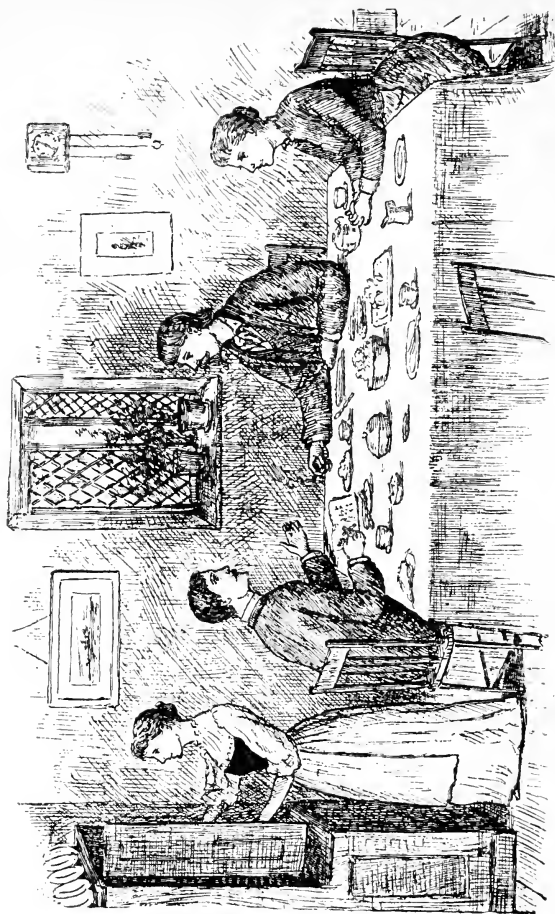
They walked slowly to the house, and into the kitchen, where supper was prepared. The table, covered with its coarse, white cloth, was set but for a homely meal; yet the traveller thought it looked charming. There was a salad that was a picture of itself in its blue-and-white bowl, with the delicate green of the wet lettuce-leaves, sprinkled with tiny, crisp leaflets of cress, relieved here and there by the creamy yellow of a

hard-boiled egg or the vivid scarlet of a radish. Around it stood the twisted loaf, a golden wedge of cheese, and the cool, glistening pats of butter, fresh from Virginie's dainty handling.

There were some stuffed tomatoes too, — ripe, red "pommés-d'amour," — more substantial than they looked, reposing in a nest of cress, and a jar of honey. And in the centre stood a brown jug filled with roses.

The vine-wreathed lattice was wide open, and through the transparent veil of quivering leaves and tendrils the low sun shone but faintly, so that the kitchen was half in cool, green shadow, and half in tremulous, golden light.

Oh, yes, it was all very charming, and perhaps Virginie, in her faded pink cotton, with a knot of carnations at the throat, was the most charming of all.



"SHE WAS STANDING ON TIPTOE BY THE DRESSER."

She was standing on tiptoe by the dresser, to reach down the blue-and-white plates, and though the occupation might be homely, — prosaic even, — it showed off the supple lines of her figure, and the delicate curves of her throat. The traveller almost wished she would stay like that; but when she turned her head, and brought into view the dusky ripples of her hair, and the blood-red carnations against her neck, he thought she looked prettier still. No doubt he was becoming enchanted, along with every one else who lived in the Castle, and the sad, gray hues of his life were giving place to the rose-color of romance.

But one grows hungry, even in romance, and François and his guest did justice to the supper at which Virginie presided, Madame sending many apolo-

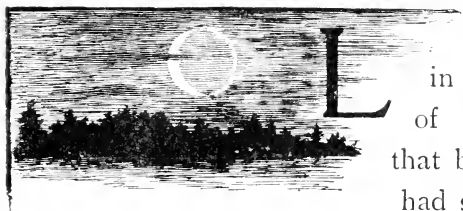
gies for her absence. The Princess was feverish and fretful, — the Queen must watch and soothe her; but Virginie could take her place, and Monsieur would understand.

It was late when they rose. Plans and means had to be discussed, and when, at length, the traveller left the Enchanted Castle, twilight had deepened to darkness, and the new moon hung suspended, like a silver sickle, above the Tree of Life.



CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE SHADOW FELL UPON THE
ENCHANTED CASTLE.



LULLED in the bosom
of the night,
that baby moon
had grown to a
beautiful bride, with a golden hoop like
a wedding ring around her, and yet
the harvest was not gathered in. The
Apples of Life were growing over ripe;
soon they would be as the Dead Sea
fruit of old, yet there they hung, like
golden lamps, upon the Tree of Life,
and no one came to gather them.

The Dragon, who had guarded them since first the pale wreaths on the budding boughs had flushed beneath the kisses of the spring, all through the green summer, and into the golden autumn, — the Dragon lay low in the dust, at the gate of the Enchanted Castle. The knight who was to climb among the branches, and win the treasured fruit, was fighting, far away, a war of words.

And the Princess — ah, the Princess! She who had played beneath the Dragon's protecting pinions, lay in the shadow, now, of other wings, — the wings of the Angel of Death.

Through the long day, and in the silent night, Virginie and Madame watched by turns beside the little crib. The quiet nursery echoed no longer to the childish rhymes and lullabies of

old, nor to the April music of baby laughter and tears. Only the faint moans of fever and the terrible chatter of delirium broke the silence, and now and then a low wail of despair, wrung from the Queen's sad heart.

Virginie stifled her grief in Madame's presence, beating down the rebellious pain, and forcing back all signs of sorrow, till it seemed as though her heart must break with the strain, and the fire of unshed tears would burn into her brain.

The King and the traveller had been gone a fortnight; and so far the old doctor, who came daily from the town, had discouraged the idea of sending for them. The fever must run its course, he said, there was no cause for unnecessary alarm. A man in a sick-room was like a bull in a china-shop; and Mon-

sieur could ill afford to leave his business. No, no, wait a little, and see what time would do.

But time only fanned into fiercer flame the cruel fever, till the frail little life seemed likely to be burned away, and even the old *médecin* took alarm.

Send for Monsieur now, by all means. He had certainly meant to act for the best in advising delay; but now, — ah, yes, Monsieur must come with all speed, though even yet he did not despair. A child's life is like a hot cinder: one moment it seems extinguished, but a breath, and, presto, we have it alight again!

In trembling haste, Virginie wrote the letter, and ran down the hill into St. Servans, to post it. She glanced reproachfully at the Blue Dragon as she hurried past. Had it not been for

that unlucky sleep in the wet grass, Marie Juliette would still be happy and well. To be sure, there was the will; but what were a thousand châteaux to the life of their love and delight, — the quaint, sweet-tempered little Princess? She had directed her letter to the Château de Laurienne, not knowing where else to send it. They had not heard from François for some time past, and knew not where the trio had gone; for old Petit had insisted on joining his son-in-law, in the firm belief that he was an invaluable witness from the circumstances of his connection with the family, and his having been present at the funeral of the old Count.

For days there came no answer. Madame waited with the dull patience of despair; Virginie with the sickening anxiety of suspense. Morning after

morning she stood at the gate, in the chill October dew, watching for the early postman; and there she hurried when evening came, straining her eyes through the dusk till the sea mist floated up the hill, and sent her shivering home, to meet the Queen's questioning glance with the blank look of failure.

Ah, how they felt their poverty now! The journey to Normandy had made lighter still the light purse; and Virginie sighed, as she took it out to pay the weekly bills. There were so many things the Princess needed, that had, till now, been almost unknown in the Enchanted Castle, — medicine, and wine, and all the necessary luxuries of illness.

As the fever neared its crisis, Monsieur Lécoz became more and more

emphatic in his demands for strengthening food and wine, and fast as these increased, the scanty store of coin wherewith to meet them dwindled faster still. He seemed anxious, too, for the return of M. de Laurienne; and Virginie grew desperate. Madame seemed sinking into the apathy of hopeless grief. She never left the nursery, but watched day and night beside the little sufferer, tortured by the sight and sound of agony she could not soothe.

On Virginie fell the heaviest burden of that heavy time. When heart and brain seemed numb with sorrow, she must think and act, and scrape and save, while the poor francs slipped through her fingers, and little debts grew daily larger. She alone must know how hopeless grew the doctor's face and words; how hard to glean from

them a grain of comfort for the sad watcher upstairs. And under all lay the haunting fear of something wrong in Normandy, — misfortune, illness, death, perhaps.

“Why do they not write? Why do they not come?” she cried despairingly,

leaning against the gate,

in the cold gray of the autumn morning. And

then, with a throb of hope, she

caught the gleam of a blue coat

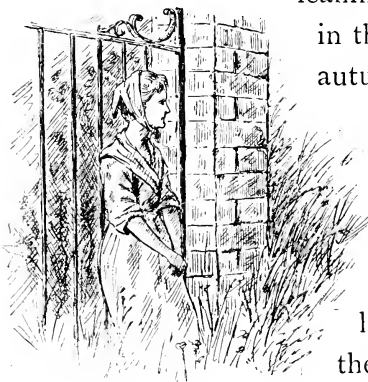
coming up the

lane. Thank God,

the *facteur* at last!

She flew to meet

him, flushed and joyous with expectation. The man uttered a civil “Bon jour!” but Virginie did not hear it;



she knew only that he took two white envelopes from the little wooden box slung across his shoulder, and put them into her hand, before he turned and went, whistling, on his way.

One was from François, written from the little assize town near Laurienne. She tore it open, and saw, with a pang of disappointment, the few hurried words scrawled in glad haste.

“The suit is won!”

Ah, God, and was this all?

No — there was the other letter fallen at her feet, — a later one, no doubt; and she stooped, and picked it up, once more in a flutter of hope.

Virginie’s heart leaped into her mouth and then fell, cold and heavy as a stone, while she gazed, with hard, dilated eyes, at the thin, white packet in her hand. It was her own letter returned.

For a moment she stood as in a dream, blankly staring at the official stamp on the envelope, and the terrible words, "Not known." Then she ran along the lane down the hill to the little post-office. There were only two francs left in her purse, but this was no time for prudent delay. With trembling fingers she seized a telegraph form, copied the address from her father's letter, and wrote underneath the short, sad summons: —

"Come at once. Marie Juliette is dying."

It was so early, so very early, surely they could reach St. Servans by night! To-night, the old doctor said, the fever would reach its crisis. The King would come — *must* come — to see the Princess die!

For in her heart of hearts, Virginie

had no hope of any other ending to this cruel illness. She might force her quivering lips to smile, and her faltering voice to speak cheerfully, when the poor mother turned to her for comfort. But she felt how false were looks and words, and how completely her own heart contradicted them. Yet how could she crush that other tender heart by already casting upon it the shadow of a blow that must too surely fall?

Mimi came trotting across the lawn to meet her, mewing plaintively. Virginie dared not let her enter the sick-room, for it tried Madame too sorely to see the poor pet's distress when her fond pats and purrings failed to win response from the sad little sufferer, who lay unconscious of it all. So Mimi's loving anxiety wrought her banishment, and she was forced to

wander, disconsolate, about the garden, or patiently to haunt the nursery door.

“What is that to us — now?” the Queen said bitterly, when Virginie showed her the King’s short note.

She sat beside the Princess, her hands lying wearily in her lap, her sad eyes fixed upon a dead rose-branch that creaked and swung outside the window.

“But I hope — I think — he will be here soon,” said Virginie, trying to speak brightly, — “perhaps to-night, Mother dear.”

“It will be too late,” said the Queen, and into her eyes came a look that sent a chill to the girl’s heart, and froze the comforting words upon her lips. For drowned in those sad eyes, all hope lay dead, and she knew now that her care

•

had been in vain. She saw, with a pang, how pale the Queen had grown, how loosely lay the wedding ring upon her finger. With a sob she turned away and went downstairs to prepare for the King's coming.

On the dresser lay the book of fairy-stories, with a leaf turned down to mark the place.

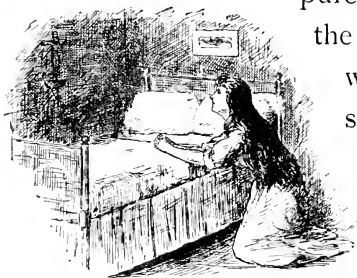
"Oh, Marie Juliette!" sighed Virginie, smoothing back the crumpled corner; and she remembered how the Princess had laughed, that sunny afternoon, when Mimi put her paw across that very page, and brought the merry reading to an end.

The doctor came and went and came again.

"About midnight, Mademoiselle," he said, the last time, "I will be here again. It is then that the critical moment

arrives, and the change takes place, for life, or death. Pray God it be for life!"

But to Virginie, kneeling in the little niche beside her bed, where hung the pure white crucifix, and



the scallop-shell of holy water, her prayers seemed vain. The suffering eyes of the sad figure above her seemed to look down in

pitiful compassion; no hope was there. The rosary slipped through her fingers, and she knelt in silence, looking up piteously.

Still the sad eyes looked down, so pure, so pitiful, with such a holy calm, Virginie's own heart throbbed into rest as she gazed, and she knelt with folded hands, in sad submission, before the carved Christ.

A golden ray that leaped into life on the walls of the little shrine, and slanting fell upon the foot of the cross, warned her that it was growing late. She rose and went, with the sweet peace still reflected in her face, into the nursery, to take her turn in watching beside the Princess.

The Queen looked up, as she gently took her place, and said, with a caressing touch, —

“What a comfort you are to me, Virginie!”

“Thank you, *ma mère*,” said Virginie, simply, kissing the hand that rested on her shoulder; “and now you must rest yourself a little, — yes, yes, just a little! So much depends upon our care to-night, we must be fit and fresh for it. See, one hour’s sleep, and then a little coffee will do you so much good!”

She coaxed Madame to lie down upon the couch by the window, covered her with a shawl, and drew the curtains to shut out the level sunset light. Then she went back to her post, and sat, quietly knitting, beside the crib.

The Queen, weary with watching and weeping, fell sound asleep. The sun dropped low, quivered upon the horizon, and went out like a lamp, leaving the room in sudden twilight. There was no sound but the soft click of Virginie's needles, and the mournful creaking of the dead rose-branch against the pane. So still the Princess lay, so soundly slept the tired figure on the couch, so silent sat the other quiet figure in the shadow, they might have been inhabitants of the Sleeping Castle — in the old, old fairy-story — over whose walls the fairy cast her drowsy spell.

Virginie's fingers sped mechanically, and her sad thoughts seemed to move in time with the musical click of her knitting needles, and were almost as monotonous.

"Marie Juliette was dying. Would the King be in time?"

Between those two ever-recurring ideas her thoughts flew backwards and forwards like a shuttle in the loom. The haunting question came with every few stitches; it was woven over and over again into the woollen stocking: "Would the King be in time?"

Suddenly into the darkness rose the sound of faint singing, like the tiny, tremulous song of a prisoned bird. As the quavering notes rose and fell, Virginie's heart, listening in the stillness, quivered and vibrated like a harp with broken strings. She dropped her head

into her hands, and her throat shook with gasping, stifled sobs.

But the little voice quavered on, like a reed-pipe out of time.

“ À mon beau château,
L'on y danse, l'on y danse !
Et moi je suis la plus gaie,
La plus gaie fillette en France ! ”

A great sob broke in upon the last line, as the crash of a minor bass strikes discord among the trilling notes of the treble. The Queen was awake and listening. Virginie caught her breath, and looked toward the window. Against the dim background of the white curtain, she could trace the dusky outline of the Queen, sitting with bowed head and clinched hands, crying bitterly in the darkness.

“ Et moi je suis la plus gaie,
La plus gaie fillette en France !
Tra, la ”

sang Marie Juliette, hoarsely, and then stopped suddenly, with a gasp.

Virginie struck a light, and carried it to the bedside. There lay the Princess, struggling for breath, with a wild terror in her beautiful, pathetic eyes, beating the air with helpless, baby hands. Virginie raised her, and held her in her arms till the breath came back, with a long, fluttering sigh, and then laid her gently down again upon the pillow. For a little while the Princess lay panting softly and staring at the light, but presently the weary lids dropped down, and she sank into a heavy sleep.

True to his word, the little doctor came soon after midnight. The Princess still lay in that heavy stupor into which she had fallen some hours before, and he took up his post near the bed,

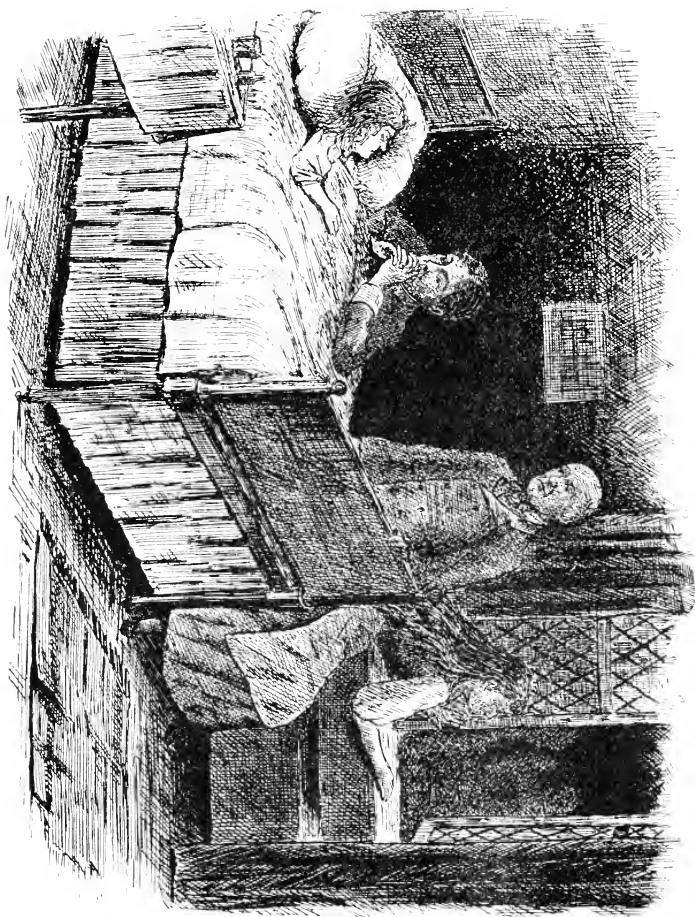
to watch patiently till the critical moment should arrive. Beside the pillow knelt the Queen, praying earnestly with trembling lips. Virginie sat in the window, leaning her weary head against the frame, watching for the King.

“Sancta Maria! Ora pro nobis!” murmured the poor mother, while the tears fell faster than the beads through her nervous fingers, “Sancta Maria! Ora pro nobis!”

Down there in the moonlit garden stood the Tree of Life, with silver leaves drooped round its golden fruit, and from the end of the laurel-walk, where he lay low in grass and dew, the fallen Dragon still kept watchful eyes upon the gate.

The moon, to-night, had thrown off her veil of mist, and floated in pure majesty on the unruffled surface of the

" BESIDE THE PILLOW KNELT THE QUEEN."



cloudless sky,—a golden ship, upon a blue night-sea.

But the Princess was floating down a darker tide, into “the land where all things are forgotten.”



CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE KING AND THE TRUE KNIGHT
CAME BACK FROM NORMANDY.



SUDDENLY
Virginie's
listening ear

caught the rush of wheels,—or was it the dead rose-branch, brushing the window-pane? She bent her head and listened intently, straining her ears to catch the faintest sound, with her hands clasped over her beating heart lest its throbs might disturb the silence. Ah, *was* it only the dead rose-branch against the pane? No, there it was

again, — crisp, distinct, the distant crunch of heavy wheels upon the gravel-drive.

Thank God, they were come at last, — and not too late! Virginie slid noiselessly past the little group by the crib, unseen or noticed only as a moving shadow. She stole swiftly downstairs, feeling her way in the darkness, and through the stone passage, white and cold in the light of the moon, where her own shadow flitted before her on the wall. Then, with eager, hurrying steps, into the kitchen, where no light shone, save the red glimmer of the failing fire. As she struggled nervously with the bolts of the door, a fiacre dashed past the window, and some one leaped out, and up the steps. Fearful lest the clang of the knocker should startle the little sleeper upstairs, Virginie wrenched

open the door, and her father strode over the threshold.

“Juliette?” he muttered hoarsely.

“Upstairs,” murmured Virginie, and François hurried away.

When she turned again to the doorway, some one else stood on the threshold, tall and dark against the moon; it was the traveller, and he held out his hand, saying cheerfully, —

“We are come at last, Mademoiselle.”

The tears rushed to Virginie’s eyes, and she caught the kind hand in her own, with a sob.

“Yes, you are come at last!” she cried; “but it is late — and our hearts are breaking!”

The traveller closed the door. He had sent the fiacre away, and they could hear the *côcher* calling, “hola!” to his tired horse, till the cries grew faint in



“AND HER FATHER STRODE OVER THE THRESHOLD.”

the distance, and all was quiet again. But Virginie still leaned against the wall, with the tears running down her cheeks. She did not move till her companion spoke, using unconsciously her own words of that night, not very long ago, when he had first come to the Enchanted Castle.

“ I am so sorry for you ! ” he said.

The tender, pitying tone went to Virginie's heart ; she covered her face with her hands, and all the pent up agony of weeks burst forth. The tears rained down through her interwoven fingers, and she shook with sobs like a marsh-flower in the wind. The traveller felt very miserable ; but he knew it was best to let grief have its way. So he waited, quietly, in the shadow of the hearth, till the passionate weeping ceased, and then went over to Virginie's side.

"Is there nothing I can get you, Mademoiselle? You must be so faint and tired, — a glass of wine, perhaps?"

"No — oh, no," said Virginie, shaking her head; and she smiled a little, sadly through her tears,



"in a minute — I shall be quite — all right. Now — let us go to the Princess."

She went on before him, up the stairs and into the nursery.

"Hush!" said the little doctor, looking up, "not yet, Mademoiselle."

The traveller walked over to the window, and stood there looking out. Virginie came and stood at his side, and looked out too, crumpling her wet handkerchief in her hand.

There was the moon, a little higher now. There lay the quiet garden, silvered with her pale kisses, dropped down between the whispering boughs of poplar and of yew.

"Oh, dear God in heaven!" breathed Virginie, softly, "do not let Marie Juliette die!"

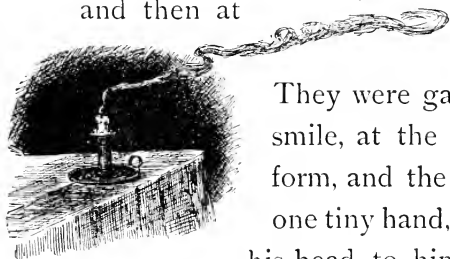
She looked toward the little group around the bed. There knelt the King and Queen, side by side, and the old doctor watched near the pillow. Between them lay the Princess, sleeping heavily. As she looked, Monsieur Lécoz quietly raised his hand, and beckoned.

Virginie touched the traveller gently, and together they joined the watchers. What had happened to the Princess? All look of pain, and the hot flush of fever, had left her baby face. It was

white now, so white and still, with the blue veins thinly traced across the pure, white brow, like the face of a baby angel carved in marble.

"Marie Juliette is dead," thought Virginie, and she looked at the traveller and then at

Monsieur
L é c o z.



They were gazing, with a smile, at the quiet little form, and the doctor held one tiny hand, and nodded his head to himself. Suddenly, with three fitful leaps, the candle went out. No matter, the moon gave light enough to see the Princess lying cold and still, in that calm sleep from which no kiss could wake her. Virginie sat on, with a dreary wonder at her heart. Why were they watching now, when all must be over; and why

was there a smile upon the traveller's face? Was it nothing to him that their Marie Juliette must die?

So the minutes slowly sprang to life, and died, one after another, like tiny bubbles blown into the air. Suddenly a clock from some church spire in St. Servans chimed clearly — two! and as the last stroke shivered into silence, the Princess opened her eyes. The room was all in darkness, save where the little square of moonlight shone, latticed with the shadows of the casement. The soft light fell upon the traveller's face, as he knelt opposite the window, and played behind him in a silver halo on the wall. As in the dreamy dawn of consciousness her waking eyes met his, the Princess looked up with a beautiful smile.

“You are a true knight,” she said

faintly; "you will rescue a distressed maiden."

The true knight gently took her little wan hand and raised it to his lips. Leaving it still within his big, brown fingers, the Princess turned her head upon the pillow, and fell into a happy sleep.

And next day they gathered in the golden harvest from the Tree of Life.



CHAPTER IX.

“À MON BEAU CHÂTEAU.”



ONCE more the
Blue Dragon
sat in state,

keeping guard over the treasures in
the drawing-room of the Château de
Laurienne.

But surely, not a year ago, he was
lying, battered and broken, down in the
long grass at the gate of the Enchanted
Castle?

“Ah, yes; that was a wonderful
story.”

When the Princess fluttered back
from those cold wings of death, into

her warm nest of life and love, she found the gates of Fairyland once more thrown open, and at the portal, grand and green as ever, sat the Blue Dragon. For the true knight had rescued the distressed maiden, and the days of chivalry were not yet dead.

Not with his good sword, nor his prancing steed had he wrought the change, but with a paste-brush, and a bottle of cement, bought at a little shop in St. Servans. With these talismans he had set the blue monster's head upon its neck, had joined the severed claw, and mended the broken wing. And then came the master-touch, the piece of magic that kept the Princess in a state of happy wonder from morn till night. You could not see the joins, — not by the smallest chip, nor tiniest crack, could you tell that the Blue Dragon had ever been broken !

For round its massive throat was traced a collar of gold, one broad rippling line, that lay upon the undulating blue like a sunbeam on the water. And the claw was circled with a golden ring that quite dazzled your eyes with its shining. The same fairy touch had spangled the broken wing with stars, and painted a crescent moon upon the tip. Indeed, the Blue Dragon looked more beautiful than ever, and all this gilding meant something, — as much, perhaps, as a Victoria Cross, or the Legion of Honor; for every golden point was an order of merit. He was more decorated than the greatest general who ever lived through a campaign; and one felt quite awed before his starry splendor. Yes, certainly, it had been beautifully done.

The first day that the Princess was

allowed to go out, she was carried, in her true knight's arms, down to the gate of the Enchanted Castle.

It was a lovely morning, quite gorgeous with the ripe, rich coloring of latest autumn. What



though the leaves had

fluttered, like brown

birds, from the bare trees ;

they made a shifting carpet of red and yellow upon the drive, and lay in drifting heaps about the stone steps of the porch, and pricked a rosy pattern out upon the lawn ; and the leafless branches made a beautiful brown tracery against the sky, so that one could see, now, what a delicate harp the wind played upon in the autumn nights. For when summer songs, with summer birds, are flown, then comes the



"SHE WAS CARRIED IN HER TRUE KNIGHT'S ARMS."

glorious Æolian music of the wind, — so sad, so sweet, haunting the bare trees like the voice of a soul. What though the garden was no longer gay with flowers and fruit; there stood the holly-bushes, like glossy Christmas-trees hung with rubies, and the brier sprays, strung with their red berries, drooped across the way, each a rosary of scarlet beads. And then so mystically blue the sky, one could gaze and gaze into the clear depths as into the pure eyes of a child; and the crisp air was like the breath of the sea, — so cold and fresh and invigorating it made the heart dance, and the pulses beat with the mere joy of being.

The Princess made a royal progress down the garden-walk. Mimi trotted before, very sleek and demure, with one eye on the holly-bushes, in case of a

robin ; and then Virginie, all aglow with the wind, tripped on, to part the briers and branches, and clear the way of falling boughs. The Princess, in her true knight's arms, came next ; and the King and Queen followed after, — the King carrying an extra shawl, lest the wind should prove treacherous, and the Queen blowing kisses whenever the Princess looked back. And so they came to the gate ; and there sat the Dragon, glittering in the sun.

They all looked expectantly at the Princess ; and the traveller smiled, as he saw the glad rose-color in her cheeks and the shining of her eyes. Mimi walked up to the blue monster, and sniffed about inquisitively for a minute, and then trotted away with a contemptuous whisk of her tail. But that must have been jealousy, for Mimi had no

ornaments, — not even a collar and bells!

“ Mais que c'est beau ! ” murmured the Princess, clasping her hands in a quiet rapture, and laughing low, with delight. She would like to stay there for hours, gazing at her dear Dragon ; but the Queen demurred. It was cold, and time for Marie Juliette to go in, she said. So they turned, and now the true knight was his lady's steed, and pranced and galloped back to the house in splendid style ; while Virginie ran on before, and Mimi rushed wildly about them, distracted, between the riotous trio and robins and whirling leaves.

But that was nearly a year ago, and now the Blue Dragon had his rights again, which was just as it should be. And François shared them, in the

Dragon's opinion, though I fancy he was sole master of the Château in his own. And the pretty Juliette of long ago was mistress of Laurienne after all. She made a charming Countess, and that is only to be expected of a Queen; for royalty can play many parts, where "Noblesse oblige" is the motto of all.

Though the Princess had left the Enchanted Castle far behind, the charm of Fairyland was still woven about her, and she lived in a dainty world of romance, where, as of old, the Blue Dragon reigned supreme. Old Petit's orchards were to her enchanted ground, for were they not the very gardens of the fairy-tale, where grew the golden apples, thick as stars? She would lie in their tremulous shade all day, looking up, with happy eyes, at the ripening

fruit above, choosing the finest and brightest for the traveller, who still stayed near, for she was very loyal to her true knight. He was all alone in the world now, for his mother had long since gone her way, "to gather her harvest in the Garden of Paradise."

But some one else led the old life in the Château de Laurienne. While the Queen laid aside her homely cares with the big bib-apron, and François exchanged the work of the drawing-master for the pleasant duties of M. le Comte, Virginie clung, with a pretty persistence that was half sweet, half wilful, to the old life and the old ways. She worked as blithely here, where work was play, as in the poor, simple days at St. Servans, — rising with the lark to learn the mysteries of milking and churning, or to practise scales and

"Do, re, mi," before the looking-glass, happy alike in drawing-room or dairy. M. le Comte might wish her to acquire the airs and graces "d' une grande dame," rather than the art of making butter, or the best method of preserving fruit. The pretty grace that comes of birth and true nobility was hers already; but "grande dame" she would never be. Still, she sang for Signor Sofala, and danced for Monsieur Pirouette, and even learned, with half-protesting sigh, to play the guitar, as befits a Demoiselle de Laurienne; but, through all this dainty masquerading, laughed the free, joyous Virginie of old.

Mimi was in high feather at Laurienne. Such milk, such cream, such sport in wood and orchard! What could one wish for more?

So they were all quite content, from

the Princess to her poor puss, Mimi, and the Dragon, who had kept the key to all this happiness, sat enthroned in their midst. Certainly, he had played his part magnificently; but no one need be surprised at that, for he was the gift of a duke.

And the traveller?

This is a romance.
And I think — in romance — the true knight who fought for love would win his own reward. He would find the beautiful maiden, perhaps, under the orchard boughs, in the glad harvest-time, and she would give him the Apple of Life, in exchange for the golden ring. And they would be very happy; for he was chivalrous and brave, and she was pure and true. As in Mendelssohn's exquisite "Duetto," the tender cadence of



the man's deep tones underflow the ringing treble of the woman's sweeter voice, so, in mingled harmony, their lives would flow—in romance.

And if into the melody there sometimes came the sighing winds of sorrow and the sound of falling tears, the music would not be less beautiful. For life, like a song, perhaps, is sweetest sung in a minor key.



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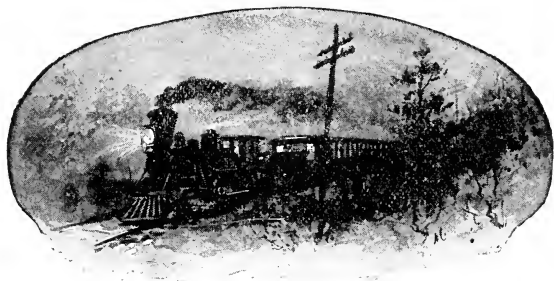
"The child is father of the man," — so Wordsworth sang ; and here is a jolly story of a little girl who was her father's mother in a very real way. There were hard lines for him ; and she was fruitful of devices to help him along, even having an auction of the pretty things that had been given her from time to time, and realizing a neat little sum. Then her father was accused of speculation ; and she, sweetly ignorant of the ways of justice, went to the judge and labored with him, to no effect, though he was wondrous kind. Then in court she gave just the wrong evidence, because it showed how poor her father was, and so established a presumption of his great necessity and desperation. But the *Deus ex machina* — the wicked partner — arrived at the right moment, and owned up, and the good father was cleared, and little Daughter Dorothy was made glad. But this meagre summary gives but a poor idea of the ins and outs of this charming story, and no idea of the happy way in which it is told. — *Christian Register*.

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